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## The art of self-assertion

JOHN BAYLEY

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MARTIN STANNARD (Editor)  
Evelyn Waugh: The critical heritage  
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The English have both gained and lost from liking their novels to be written by "characters". Certainly our most celebrated novelists, and the ones most appreciated by foreigners too, have written novels which directly reflect their remarkable selves. That remarkable self need not take the form of high intelligence, although his own kind of intelligence is a necessary accompaniment of any real character. But not predominant intellect, of the kind that writes *The Man without Qualities*, *Auto-da-Fé*, *The Magic Mountain*. The nearest the English novel comes to that is with Conrad or George Eliot, novelists often preferred by academic critics to our more traditional sort.

However much academic criticism may rationalize them, novels written by true characters are usually adored or disliked on deep instinctive grounds. The reader feels a complex rapport with the writer or he does not, and criticism can ultimately make very little of this relationship. It may be love-hate, or something odder than that, but its involvement depends upon the writer not "being" a character self-consciously, but achieving the essence of one in terms of the organization and inspiration of art. Dickens may have called himself "the inimitable", but he had no idea what a much more extraordinary personality his novels in fact contained, made visible in the light of a reader's response.

The personality actually proffered by a novelist, the intelligent friendship, as it were, extended by an *Aldous Huxley* or a *Margaret Drabble*, is quite another thing: its necessary vulnerability is open to malice, as in other kinds of friendship, and to the patronage of modified interest or approval. The relation, however mutually gratifying, remains a cool one. But whoever felt judicious malice or approving coolness towards the work of Elizabeth Bowen, say, or that of Barbara Pym, or Evelyn Waugh? An absurdly heterogeneous trio? Not really, because for all of them, as in a love relation, you either fall or you don't. And

the love-provoking element is also the presence of character, which only the art, not its owner, can fully display.

Novelists of character do of course try themselves out in their art in various roles. Dickens did it in a perpetual drama of self-discovery, whose object was not so much self-knowledge as the idea of discovery for its own sake - a dramatic process. Evelyn Waugh, as one might expect, was extremely conscious in his roles, which modified locally as he grew older. The first volume of his unfinished memoirs, *A Little Learning*, contains at least two indications that he had considered his own nature specifically in relation to his heredity. His grandfather once killed a wasp which had alighted on his wife's forehead by pressing it down and into the flesh. His father, Arthur Waugh, so a friend who came to stay remarked to the author, was delighted, but played a part the whole time. Like all big "characters" Evelyn Waugh played himself instinctively, but with an increasing richness and fanaticism.

Snobbery, as has often been said, is based on fear, essentially fear of not being anybody, rather than of not being the right sort of person. The Trimmers and Hoopers in Waugh's fiction have no existence, while the right sort of people, though they are often sketched in an equally perfunctory way, always have their innate self-assurance brilliantly indicated. That self-assurance meant a very great deal to Waugh, and it would not be too much to say that the principal dynamic in his fiction is its attainment or retention. Both in his fictional world and in his own life he was the reverse of sycophantic. The upper classes were seen with a cold eye and often treated with the maximum rudeness. In part this was because they failed to live up to the standards Waugh imagined for them, standards which formed an integral part of his whole package of secular and religious romanticism. But ultimately this is less important in Waugh's world than his need to establish the character of his protagonists in terms of their self-assurance.

In *Decline and Fall*, the innocent whose innocence is itself a kind of unshakable worldliness. No more than Charles Ryder or Guy Crouchback is he ever really at a disadvantage. It is the same with Tony Last, in *A Handful of Dust*, whose pedigree is such that all his misfortunes and humiliations do not disturb the social poise his creator has invested in him. Tony knows how to behave, in a heartless world the clue to whose aesthetic construction is that it is the

world read about in the popular press, the world seen through the eyes of the couple on Brighton beach, where the prostitute's little girl is trying to persuade Tony to let her bathe. In the world as seen through the tabloids it is entirely plausible that the guilty wife should fear for a moment that her lover has died when the news of her child's death is broken to her, or that an explorer should be kept captive for ever in the Brazilian jungle.

*A Handful of Dust* is such an uncharacteristic tour de force in Waugh's world that Tony's solidarity with his peers in the other novels shows up as a very significant feature. The man who actually supplanted Waugh in his first wife's affections was, in fact, as we can see in Anthony Powell's memoirs, a great deal more like Tony Last, in terms of background and personality, than Waugh himself was. Brenda Last's lover, John Beaver, on the other hand, is a gruesome image of the kind of person Waugh most dreaded being seen as and taken for. So coolly brilliant a performance is *A Handful of Dust*, and so much an anti-character novel - that is to say a novel not embodying and indulging the idea of a character - that it is easy to overlook its deep affinity with the rest of Waugh's fiction. Guy Crouchback, with his continual failures in every department of life - civil, military and domestic - is a Tony Last transposed back into the "character" novel, the kind that in the end came most naturally to Waugh. The hero of *The Loved One*, even Gilbert Pinfold, given the slighter specification of their stories, are really brothers under the skin with Guy, Guy the loser who loses everything but himself, his own superbly established authenticity.

For it is one of the paradoxes of Waugh's art that when he was portraying, most obviously and most leisurely, a romantic self-projection, it becomes his most effective and convincing "character" part. Only his talent as an artist enabled Waugh to create Guy, and the more richly he is compromised with Waugh's own dreams and desires the more Guy becomes a reality. One of the reader's pleasures is to observe the ways in which he and the author studiously ignore the connection, though both know perfectly well what is going on. Authenticity in Waugh is always a kind of parody, or self-parody, and in a sense his tongue is never more in cheek than when he really lets himself go, magnificently, even movingly, so, as when we are treated to the roll-call of the Catholic gentry who attend Guy's father's funeral, the

evocation of life on a great Illyrian estate in *Helena*, or in the Imperial heartland of old Abyssinia, or the last hour of the heroine in *The Loved One*.

There is of course a price to be paid for the way in which art outsoars life in Waugh's work, and it looms at the back of this extraordinarily rich collection of criticism assembled by Martin Stannard. Most reviewers at the time of publication, and most critics since, begin by using the *ad hominem* approach. Waugh is a reactionary, a fascist, a snob, a Catholic bigot. Almost all the more thoughtful critics though, as one notices, then move to an amendment of some sort. He is accused of *this* but he is really *that*: he is no satirist but a romantic or a Wodehousian humorist, no Céline but an unworried aesthete and craftsman. He is an empiricist of brutal good sense, never judging from the standpoint of fashion and ideology. In their different ways all Waugh's critics acknowledged the fact that as an artist he escaped from any merely personal shortcomings and limitations.

There is none the less a significant difference between English and American attitudes. American critics are almost unanimous in their dislike of post-war Waugh. For them he is a satirist or he is nothing, and for Joseph Frank in the *New Republic*, *Men at Arms* "illustrates the unhappy predicament of a satirist who has fallen in love with his subject". Delmore Schwartz in *Parisian Review* was particularly severe on Waugh's capitulation to Catholicism, a capitulation, as it seemed to him, without belief:

human beings are ridiculous without religious belief, and they are just as ridiculous when they are possessed by religious belief, but at least when they are truly religious they have a touching, pathetic, bewildered quality... no great fantasy is required to read his recent novel... as the fiction of an agent provocateur in the pay of a society for the propagation of atheism.

Like other Americans, Delmore Schwartz had a knowledge of Waugh's work, and to a tradition of anarchy that had nothing provincial about it. But Americans who had no trouble with the more esoteric English aspects of Waugh's early fiction stuck at the upper-class Catholicism of *Brideshead Revisited* and its successors.

The early Waugh had been a successful outsider, always a sympathetic type; the later

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John Bayley



Waugh was a failed insider. From *A Handful of Dust* on, his fiction became increasingly a method of defending himself, by aesthetic means, from situations that disturbed his life or shook his confidence, and his war experiences clearly shook that confidence much more even than the defection of his first wife. For the first time he had to face real unpopularity, the knowledge that nobody wanted him in a responsible position, or even where his native pugnacity would have been a real asset. He was bad news in a context where obscure endurance and unspectacular toil were winning the war. So in effect he dismissed the war. He took refuge in a heroic and Catholic past, dedicated to failure of a sort acceptable to romance. He sank to second-hand Catholic metaphor – the “twich upon the thread” – of the sort purveyed by Chesterton and Belloc. The Waugh who had been so pungent and penetrating about foreign parts – Africa, America, above all Abyssinia – could not bring himself to do justice to the struggle he was really involved in, nor to his fellow-soldiers.

But even this is controversial, as our admirable compilation so well brings out. Nothing about Waugh is uncontroversial; in that sense he and his masterpieces are characters like Falstaff and Hamlet, about whose real nature there can be endless dispute. One thing is certain: there is nothing bogus about any of his books, nothing diminished by time. Henry Reed, who more than most critics had a piercing eye for the bogus, wrote a brilliant review of *Brideshead Revisited* in the *New Statesman*, warmly praising its unique blend of evocation and sharp perception, its superlative portraits of persons like Charles Ryder's father and Sebastian Flyte's mother – “patient, wonderful, cunning, and unbearable”. He admits the second-hand effects of the dogma, which weighs upon the end of plot like the Leninist theology in a Soviet Russian novel, but implies that the book makes a triumphantly realistic

use of its own fantasy, as, one might add, novels like *Daniel Deronda* have also done. Fantasy in Waugh is never under the counter. Their structure of continuous and vivid self-assertion ensures there is not the faintest whiff of hypocrisy in his novels. His vices are made more use of than his virtues, but it is important to the overall picture that Waugh strikes us in the last resort, and despite himself, as a fundamentally good egg.

In the absence of Waugh's friends the persona in the travel books, notably *Ninety-Two Days*, is wholly congenial, without at all attempting to be so. This basic truth seems to have struck Rose Macaulay, one of Waugh's most commonsensical and consistently affectionate critics, who usually reviewed his books in *Horizon*. She stood no nonsense from him, shaking her head over the unscholarliness of the Campion biography and the “Fascist tract” element in *Waugh in Abyssinia*, but on the whole she took him as he came, in the spirit of boys will be boys, and enjoyed his literary personality for its own sake. In *Waugh in Abyssinia* it is at its most direct, vividly confident; the book is still as fresh as paint, and hindsight makes its candid thesis even more convincing. The Emperor had no clothes, as Waugh saw; his empire was a congerie of subject peoples held down by Abyssinian garrisons who despised and robbed them, offering none of the material progress which was the real if smug justification for European hegemony. The Italians at least brought good roads and good order, without the scourges of Marxism or militant Islam, and the present history of the area does nothing to contradict Waugh's observation.

His prejudices and his contempt for “the whinney of the nonconformist conscience” (a phrase now curiously dated) are none the less objectionable for that, as Rose Macaulay and other reviewers pointed out. No doubt he did see the Italian soldiers playing with Abyssinian children, and no doubt Marshal Graziani (who was later to be so signally defeated in the West) really did resemble “the traditional *Don Quixote* and *Don Juan*”. As the book rises to its peroration it comes the more to the same way, and shows romance playing the same part that it does in *Helena*, *Campion*, or *Brideshead*. “New roads will be radiating to all points of the compass, and along them will pass the eagles of ancient Rome, as they came to

our savage ancestors in France and Britain and Germany.” Fascist Italy is neatly subsumed in the same category as the Roman empire and the Roman church. While Waugh's plain style revels in the unregenerate, his high style indulges a vision of spiritual order and *Civitas Dei*; a traditional combination, and one as essential to his personality as to his pen.

Equally pleasurable and profitable to the scholar and researcher is the way in which Dr Stannard has included running fights between the critics, such as that in the *Listener* between Desmond MacCarthy, reviewing the Campion biography, and J. A. Kensit of the Protestant Truth Society. Donat O'Donnell (the sobriquet of Conor Cruise O'Brien) and T. J. Barrington engage in *The Bell* with Irish ease and expertise on the Catholic question, O'Brien making a brilliant comparison between Waugh and Proust, who “never took the decisive step from romanticism to the acceptance of dogma”. Stannard himself had an admirable piece, full of insights, in the *New Review* on the *Waugh Diaries*; he points to the continued presence in his life of the figure of Rossetti, subject of Waugh's first book, and quotes from it this extremely significant judgment. “There was fatally lacking in him [Rossetti] that essential rectitude that underlies the serenity of all great art”. As the *Diaries* show, Waugh strove for that rectitude, and as works of art his books do in their own way display its serenity.

Reviewing the Letters for the *Guardian*, Philip Larkin points out that Waugh's entourage, and his need for its rapidly heartless, upper-class gossip, was the worst thing about him. None the less his nature was “impenetrably indivisible”, writes Larkin in a striking phrase, even though, as with many great writers, his readers found in him what they sought. Thus Brigid Brophy in the *New Statesman* considered Waugh as a modified Fribank, another angel at writing, or rather “a baroque cherub on a funerary monument, forever ushering in the Dies Irae”. At one time or another every critic or fellow-artist seems to have had his say cast his net widely: the present reviewer was startled to find a piece he did as a second-year undergraduate for the now defunct *National and English Review*. The only regrettable omission, but perhaps it was too recent to include, is Anne Pasternak-Slater's analysis in *Essays in Criticism of A Handful of Dust*.

## Traditional strengths

Mark Casserley

**KERRY MCSWEENEY**  
Four Contemporary Novelists: Angus Wilson, Brian Moore, John Fowles, V. S. Naipaul  
217pp. Scholar Press. £16.50.  
0859676730

In this study Kerry McSweeney champions the “representational and communicative strengths of the traditional novel” in the works of his chosen authors; he also believes that the ordinary mediating work of criticism is undervalued today, and therefore offers evaluations of all their novels, picking out general characteristics and dominant preoccupations.

McSweeney considers Angus Wilson's development to be representative of post-war changes in the English novel as a whole. In *The Middle Age of Mrs. Eliot*, Wilson is trying to combine nineteenth-century “diversity” with modernist “depth”, while his later recognition of the problematic nature of fiction lies behind the “alienating devices” in *No Laughing Matter*. But McSweeney points out that these devices also offer an outlet for what Wilson calls his “grand guignol side”, and goes on to suggest that the book is closer to *Tom Jones* and *Vanity Fair* than modern experimental fiction, thereby stressing Wilson's attachment to traditional English novelistic concerns.

John Fowles's existential point of view, his belief that “unknowing, or *l'égare*, is as vital to man as water”, leads him to challenge and subvert those concerns; but McSweeney argues that the importance of the ideas Fowles believes he has to communicate gives him his commitment to “writing that wants to get read”. It is thus his narrative powers that receive emphasis: McSweeney finds him a writer

who “unfolds rather than grows”, and whose “paradigmatic methods of narrative presentation” do not vary: the central male character, for example, undergoes a *rite-de-passage* (Clegg, in *The Collector*, being a negative exemplar, in that he fails to change). Unfortunately, McSweeney's methods bring out the didactic and repetitive aspect of Fowles at the expense of the “richness” McSweeney praises.

An unvarying concern with the burden of the past and the primary of parental ties, and the recurring “basic paradigm” (dramatization of the crises in an ordinary person's life) in Brian Moore's fiction are seen as positive virtues in McSweeney's account. He asserts their importance, but he has more success in showing the expansion of Moore's range in the North American novels. The central influence on Moore's early development is “the celebration of the commonplace”; *I Am Mary Dunne*, however, shows a creative engagement with the Molly Bloom section of *Ulysses*.

McSweeney's impatience with Englishness – apropos of Fowles, he speaks of “that without which (it sometimes seems) no English novel can be conceived: a preoccupation with class” – lies behind his warmth towards Moore, and, in particular, V. S. Naipaul. In endorsing Naipaul's opinion that he has become less “colonial” while the English have become more so, McSweeney suggests that “a novelist of society and of traditional liberal values”, like Wilson, may be seen as the chronicler of a marginal society, while Naipaul is a novelist of “the unholding centre of the contemporary world”. Naipaul is the hero of this book: supported by his intelligence and sensibility, he refuses to escape into fantasy, or to “luxuriate in the creative continuities of the *Crée de roman*”.

## Fogg rides again

John Ure

**NICHOLAS COLERIDGE**  
Around The World In 78 Days  
220pp. Heinemann. £9.95.  
0434 140619

Most travel books fall between two poles. At one pole is the Remarkable Adventure: the Everest-in-gym-shoes or Across-the-Gobi-on-a-tricycle syndrome. At the other is the literary masterpiece: *Arabia Deserta* or *Old Calabria*. Books at the first pole are read out of curiosity or awe; those at the second for aesthetic pleasure. Most contemporary travel writing is an attempt to bring these two poles together; a notable experience is memorably described, and the result is a *Brilliant Adventure* or *Slow Walk in the Hindu Kush*. We admire the exploit and we relish the writing.

Nicholas Coleridge's exploit is not a breathtaking one, nor is his prose lapidary. But he had a jolly idea – to retrace Jules Verne's famed fictional traveltogue and try to better it. Eighty Days without resort to that new-fangled device, the aeroplane – and he brought to the task intrepid high spirits, an ingenious persistence, a columnist's eye for the pertinent social or sartorial indicator, and a journalist's ear for dialogue.

The result is a rather breathless book: Coleridge is, perforce, always in a hurry to catch the next train, boat or rickshaw, and his willing-like himself – is perpetually hopping from topic to topic and from encounter to encounter in a staccato and at times frenetic way. The mild excitement of the race does not adequately compensate for the absence of developed character or sustained observation. This mattered less with Jules Verne because, with the liberty of the novelist, he packed his narrative with startling incidents and spectacular adventures. Coleridge is handicapped by the requirement to be truthful or at least credible; not for him the luxury of rescuing Indian princesses or fighting off Redskins – though he does carry a swordstick and have the odd tricky moment.

It is just a hundred years since Jules Verne wrote his best-seller, and one might have imagined that the intervening century would have seen rapid strides in land and sea transport; as the reader shares Coleridge's frustrations at inaccurate timetables, cancelled sailings, delayed trains and non-existent taxis, the perception ultimately dawns that the Victorians organized these things rather better than we do. Of course, British readers will also reflect that Phineas Fogg had another great advantage over Coleridge: his route lay predominantly through lands of the British Empire and across seas dominated by Britannia, while now on the same route only Hongkong retains its Governor (not, incidentally, Governor-General as Coleridge maintains). Like Mussolini (in this, though happily in little else) the British Raj had a gratifying way of ensuring that transport ran on time.

Perhaps realizing that he has to contend with a certain thinness of material, Coleridge strains a little hard at times. The parallel with Fogg's journey on an elephant across part of north India turns out to be no more than a few moments on the back of a circus elephant in Milan, and the descriptions of social life in Hongkong have the contrived gaiety of the gossip columnist.

But when he is further from Pall Mall or The Peak these mannerisms drop away and the ups and downs of the story take over. The vagaries of the Djibouti Sheraton are described with an engaging humour; the boredom of crossing the Arabian sea on a motorized dhow is memorably depicted without (no easy achievement) being boring itself; the earnest conversation on the Bombay-Madras train would find an honourable place in *The Great Railway Bazaar*; and the analysis of clinically clean Singapore rings sharply true.

It is to be hoped that Mr Coleridge will write other travel books and that when next he takes up his Gucci biro (he lost the last one down the hole of the oriental convenience) on the Maitland express he may give himself an occasional moment to stand and stare at the world.

## A monumental footnote

Stefan Collini

**NOEL ANNAN**  
Leslie Stephen: The godless Victorian  
432pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £16.50.  
0297 783696

“STEPHEN, Sir Leslie (1832-1904), first editor of this Dictionary, man of letters and philosopher; grandson of James Stephen (q.v.); third son of Sir James Stephen (q.v.), and younger brother of Sir James Fitzjames Stephen (q.v.). . . . When Maitland came to write the commemorative *Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen* he mused on how the editor who had run his pen through so many over-long entries on forgotten worthies would have been at least equally severe in paring down his own entry: ‘educated at Eton and Trinity Hall . . . owing to some religious scruples he resigned the tutorship . . . became editor of the *Cornhill* and afterwards of this Dictionary . . . climbed the Schreckhorn’ and so forth; but I am not sure”, added Maitland knowingly, “that even the Schreckhorn would not have been suppressed”. Fortunately, his successors proved more indulgent, and even in the compressed record of the *Concise DNB* Stephen properly fills a whole column.

The bare facts point to a central Victorian cultural figure, central by heredity, education, and career. The curt “man of letters and philosopher” (Stephen would have been hugely gratified to find that second identity given such prominence) disguises the range of his writings, which were copious even by the expansive standards of his day: five volumes on the history of thought (including one minor masterpiece, *The History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*), five studies in the English Men of Letters series, three full-length “Life and Letters” biographies, two books of reminiscences, one large philosophical treatise, and well over 150 substantial essays, articles and introductions, some of which were collected in *Essays in Criticism*.

Three volumes of literary criticism, three more of national history, two of public lectures, and still the end is not yet. Apart from his labours as editor of the *DNB*, he wrote an extraordinary total of 378 entries himself, many of them substantial pieces of scholarship (“I am surprised to find that I did so much in the way of articles” was his characteristic response on being informed of this number). In compiling the *Life*, Maitland confined himself, insofar as the unmistakable impress of his own rich talent would allow, to a fairly conventional narrative, expressing the hope that “someone will some day do for him what he to our admiration did for many others: illustrate in a small compass his life by his books, his books by his life, and both by their environment”.

Forty years on, Noel Annan took up Maitland's challenge, and his *Leslie Stephen: His thoughts and character in relation to his time*, published in 1951, quickly established a reputation as an exceptionally perceptive and readable piece of intellectual history. Together with a related essay that appeared a few years later on “The Intellectual Aristocracy”, it exercised a considerable influence on subsequent work in the whole field of Victorian studies; at the time, a relatively underdeveloped area of scholarly research. The book gave a particularly compelling account of the way in which the Evangelical upbringing of many of those who were to distinguish themselves as agnostics and doubters none the less exercised a pervasive power over their thought, especially in the form of the ceaseless scrutiny of motive and in the tangible pressure of the imperatives of duty and altruism. What Annan's hands had the illuminating force of an original sketch has now come to be a rather obstructively mechanical explanation, routinely cited as the source of all that was distinctive about the moral world of late-nineteenth-century intellectuals; but the pioneer is hardly to be blamed for the slums built by those who pointed after him. Similarly, Annan's lovingly compiled chart of the interconnected networks of family and education which constituted what he felicitously termed “The Intellectual Aristocracy” has been one of the most widely-cited articles in the literature of Victorian cultural history, even if some rather large claims about

the putatively homogeneous character of intellectual life in nineteenth-century England have been made on the basis of its essentially genealogical researches. Naturally, the field now looks rather different after the intensive work of the past three decades, and it is also true that more sources touching on Stephen's life, especially his family life, have become available. Meanwhile, Annan's original book had long since been allowed to go out of print.

*Leslie Stephen: The godless Victorian* is a very considerably re-written and expanded version of that book, too different merely to be considered a revised edition, too similar legitimately to stand as a genuinely new creation. Mark II is well over half as long again as Mark I, but the outlines of the original are still clearly visible, following essentially the same sequence of chapters, with very large sections of Mark I reproduced verbatim (the well-known chapter on “Evangelicalism”, for example, reappears almost unaltered). There is, I think, no ground for complaint about this. Simply to have re-issued the original would have invited charges of culpable laziness; to have started from scratch would, given its enduring merits, have seemed somewhat wilful. All that was valuable in the original seems to have been preserved, and the substitution of the slick new subtitle for its undeniably ponderous but accurate predecessor does not betoken any significant shift of tone in the book itself.

There are two main kinds of change from Mark I. The first is in the use of new source-material, particularly in relation to Stephen's family life, where Virginia Woolf now becomes the chief witness (largely for the prosecution, it must be said, for Stephen's unreasonable domestic behaviour is recorded in vivid detail). The Maitland papers have also yielded a few nuggets. Perhaps as a result of the incorporation of this new material, Mark II is a bit more biographical in emphasis than Mark I. The portrait of Stephen is deepened but not fundamentally altered. Readers of Mark I would not have anticipated his daughter's

is an observation that falls naturally into place in the fuller account of Mark II. In addition, there is now a tantalizingly brief exploration of Stephen's manic-depressive tendencies and their possible connection with Virginia Woolf's fits of insanity. The other kind of change concerns the different emphases Annan now wishes to place in his interpretation of Stephen's thought or his account of its intellectual context. The only significant alteration in the former is the much fuller treatment of Stephen's very revealing relation to the eighteenth century, which he did much to rehabilitate after the extremes of the Romantic reaction. Drawing, with generous acknowledgment, on John Bicknell's work, Annan brings out the subtle ways in which Stephen's handling of Augustan Deism, which Stephen's handling of Augustan Deism, in particular, reflected the agnostic polemics of the 1860s and 70s. As far as the wider intellectual context is concerned, a prominent place is now assigned in modern cultural history (Annan does not shrink from large themes and the broad brush-strokes) of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The cultural tour here, which takes us from Bach to Helsenberg as well as from Kant to Weber, really is a bit brisk, and it is more disconcerting still to discover that the important thing to be said about Stephen's connection with this “Renaissance” is that there is so little of it: Certainly there are large and interesting questions that could be raised about the relations, or lack of them, between English and German intellectual life during this period, but a study of Leslie Stephen does not seem the most obviously promising setting in which to try to raise them.

On the whole, these revisions and expansions, this last topic apart, are worked into the fabric of the original very harmoniously, and no one coming to the subject for the first time need feel the shadow of Mark I falling across these always very readable pages. The references grouped at the back of the book are, it has to be said, a motley and somewhat disordered crew. As pendants to the unreviewed passages, there are whole gangs of them which indicate clearly what was in fashion c1950, while elsewhere they are jostled, not always unreasonably, by several proudly sporting

the cut of the 1980s and in both cases some of them may seem a little underdressed by the standards of strict bibliographical propriety. The selection of secondary sources is idiosyncratic, to say the least, but it would be a foolish reader who came to this book for a reliable and impartial guide to recent scholarship when it has much richer, and rarer, treasure to offer.

Stephen is a demanding subject, at once attractive and daunting. His own skills as biographer, critic, and historian of thought threaten the clumsy or insensitive with invidious comparisons, and the treacherous thickness of his irony, modesty and other forms of self-defence will yield few of their secrets to any but a sophisticated inquirer. Maitland, who loved him dearly (“I think no man is so fond or as pleasant to me in every way”), had that instinctive delicacy of touch and quickness of mind that enabled him to meet Stephen on something like even terms. Consider, for example, how well he caught, unmasked, and at the same time paid affectionate homage to, Stephen's tone of only partly false modesty: “Indeed, at times if you adhered to the letter of Stephen's words, you would believe that he had sometimes looked at a few books, that he had now and then scribbled for newspapers, and that, by way of relaxation from this fatiguing toil, he had strolled across some rising ground in the neighbourhood of Grindelwald or Zermatt.”

Annan disclaims any ambition to try to emulate or replace Maitland, but although this book is not a biography it is a tribute to Annan's skill in evoking his subject's character that one finds oneself drawn to imagining Stephen, slumped in his usual rocking-chair, reading this more analytical, more critical, account of himself. There would, no doubt, be a larger than usual number of snorts and groans, though perhaps of shy embarrassment and tickled vanity as well as of irritation and dissent. The habit of years might lead the opening paragraphs of a review to get themselves written, and if so, he would be forced, as a

self-described “literary gent”, to acknowledge the professional polish and high quality of much of the writing. For Annan, too, can command an enviably light touch, rich in metaphor on some occasions, epigrammatically terse on others (“There has always been a good deal to be said against the Brontës and Stephen said most of it”). And of course, that corridor of English life which runs between Cambridge and London literary journalism and along which Stephen's generation were the first to move, is a beat not unknown to Annan himself. Perhaps Annan's own experience of public life has been more of an asset than one might expect in dealing with a retiring man of letters.

Other Victorian sages have in some ways been better served than Stephen by the immensely increased productivity of the scholarly industry in recent decades. While they are entombed in mausoleums of Collected Works and Annotated Letters, he, as he would no doubt have preferred, has escaped this honour; bookshops know him not, except insofar as he mingles with his vastly more numerous erstwhile theological adversaries on the second-hand shelves. It is also true that some of his contemporaries have been treated to more systematically researched and exhaustive biographies; many, certainly, have had more abundant garlands of learned attributes laid on their graves. But none has been so sympathetically brought to life as the irritable, ironic, suffering, lovable figure who inhabits these pages. There is a depth of insight and sheer literary talent here that takes this book out of the company of the thoroughly footnoted, thoroughly dull academic monograph. Stephen said, in one of those characteristic moments of revealingly false modesty, that he would only merit a footnote in the history of his age, an oddly recondite final resting-place to have anticipated. How much more appropriate that he should get, not a footnote, but this spacious, opinionated and humane study of “his thought and character in relation to his time”.

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# The intellectual climatologist

Michael Howard

R. J. BULLEN, H. POGGE VON STRANDMANN  
and A. B. POLONSKY (Editors)  
*Ideas into Politics: Aspects of European  
history 1880-1950*  
225pp. Croom Helm. £15.95.  
070990695 X

The Festschrift is deservedly unpopular as a literary form. Publishers dislike it because it does not sell. Academics find it irritating because the connecting thread—reverence and gratitude to a distinguished scholar—is seldom enough to bind the contents into a coherent whole, and so work of great if recondite value may remain unobserved in rather unlikely company. Whatever the quality of its contents, two cheers are as much as any Festschrift is likely to get from even the most sympathetic reviewer. But *Ideas into Politics* deserves both. First, James Joll has in his quiet way had a major influence on European historians over the past quarter of a century, and well deserves to be thus honoured. And second, the approach which he has himself practised and encouraged in his pupils, an approach well defined in the title of this collection, provides an element of unity which gives the work unusual coherence.

Professor Joll is an intellectual historian—indeed an *intellectual's* historian—of a kind unusual in Britain. The rest of us realize that the philosophers and the artists are there and that we ought to be aware of what they are doing. Even if we cannot understand the former or appreciate the latter, we know that the history we write, whether political, military, economic or social, will be incomplete and one-sided if it does not at least take account of *Kulturgeschichte*. But Joll starts with the thinkers and artists, and establishes the intellectual climate before exploring the events and processes which other historians, whether traditional or Marxist, regard as primary. History, that we cannot understand their actions unless we understand their ideas, be they formulated or unformulated. For him philosophy is not superstructure but bedrock. In his *History of Europe since 1870* there is something magnifi-

cent, if at times irritating, about the disdain with which he treats the world of finance and industry and focuses on intellectual currents. It comes as no surprise to learn that as an undergraduate he read Creus. It gave him a range and intellectual curiosity too often denied to historians with more orthodox backgrounds.

As the valuable bibliography in this Festschrift makes clear, much of Joll's work has to be excavated from other Festschriften and comparable collections of articles put together by scholarly entrepreneurs. This goes, unfortunately, for his much quoted and deservedly renowned Inaugural Lecture for the Stevenson Chair in the University of London, 1914: *the Unspoken Assumptions*. It is a pity that the editors did not reprint it as an introduction to this collection. Not only did it crystallize Joll's own thinking, as any Inaugural properly should, but it rescued the 1914 debate from the arid controversies about guilt and responsibility, based on microscopic study of diplomatic documents, and opened up an entire new area for historical inquiry. It deserves to be made far more widely available.

It is within these areas, of the intellectual and conceptual background to political action, that the contributions to this collection very largely fall. The bulk of them deal with the inter-war years, focusing largely on Germany. Three deal with the pre-war period and four with developments since 1945. These last, by Charles Majer, Anthony Nicholls, Volker Bergahn and Roger Bullen, have a particular coherence, in that they trace the development, in the United States and elsewhere, of those ideas of liberal capitalism, the interaction of state power and economic enterprise, which led to the achievement of Ludwig Erhard's "economic miracle" in West Germany and the implementation of the Schuman Plan; the foundation, in fact, of the open society in which we now live. They come like benign sunshine after the *Sturm und Drang* described by the earlier contributors, focusing as they Nazi Germany, European Marxism, Fascism

There are two essays on "international history", traditional in their approach though fitting well into the general theme of the collection. Paul Kennedy describes the changing atti-



Anton von Werner's painting "Einhüllung des Richard Wagner-Denkmal im Tiergarten", 1908, transferred in the article by Iain Boyd Whyte on page 1128.

tude of Britain and Germany towards the United States at the turn of the century; Britain coming to see her not as a cantankerous competitor but as a like-minded ally whose expansion was to be welcomed, Germany abandoning benevolent detachment for ideological hostility. Zara Steiner shows how even after 1918 the British Foreign Office continued to believe that Britain could protect her imperial interests yet hold the political balance between France and Germany in Europe (though, poor things, what else were they to believe?).

Elsewhere, David Schoenbaum briskly condemns the military in inter-war Germany for having aspirations to conquest far beyond their capacity to fulfil them; though he rather begs the question as to what the aspirations of the military actually were. Robin Lehman and Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann deal respectively with mass-culture and heavy industry in the Weimar Republic and the part both played in undermining its political system. Jeremy Nokes shows how the Nazi policy of sterilization, about eugenics in Germany and elsewhere; and Tim Mason examines the failure of the German social democrats and communists to resist Nazism.

The inter-war years are completed by two

contrasting studies in Fascism: Roderick Kedward on Charles Maurras (if indeed that unique oddity can be classified as anything) and Andrew Polonsky on the Pole, Roman Dmowski, whose contempt for Germanic "decadence" led him to look to Italy for a model. Kedward's excellent judgment on Maurras could do service for both: his "mental constructs were designed to protect him from human realities rather than to explain or understand them". This is Jollism at its best.

Jollism at its best is also to be found in David Morgan's essay on Marxism in pre-1914 Germany, which not only shows how Marxism itself was transformed by positivism and social Darwinism into dialectical materialism, but explains why the SPD, in spite of its massive support, was politically so impotent and inept. But the jewel of the collection, for my money, is Modris Epstein's study of pre-war modernism in Germany, which makes clearer to us than anything I have yet read why German intellectuals welcomed "the war as a new *Befreiung*, and why it was that, intellectually, the Germans might be said to have won the war. But altogether it is an excellent collection. As so often with Croom Helm, one regrets that they could not produce it in a decent format, but is grateful to them for publishing it at all.

currently working in London and Paris respectively, Wolfgang Mommsen and Rudolf von Thadden, represented here by essays on the problems of discontinuity in the concepts of "fatherland", "state", and "nation", in German history.

However, this book as a whole must be seen as part of the efforts now being made by German intellectuals of the centre and centre-right to show that they too, despite their more publicly emphasized alignment with the United States and NATO's nuclear policy, are by no means prepared to let concern with "the German question" remain a monopoly of the Left.

The main theme of the book is set out in the long introductory section by the editor, a Mainz University political scientist who is known to be close to the Christian Democratic Chancellor, Helmut Kohl. The theme is that of the relationship between past, present and future: given that the Federal Republic, although a German state, is not coterminous with the German nation, how can German statesmen maintain a balance between their responsibility for that nation as a whole, their need to conduct official dealings with the other German state, and their relationships with their Western neighbours and American allies?

Weidenfeld and his co-authors offer a fascinating exploration of this question and its ramifications in Germany's past and present collective consciousness, though as scholars they stop short of giving a detailed answer in terms of policy prescriptions. However, as Richard von Weizsäcker remarks in his own book-length contribution to the debate on Germany's future, "a question does not cease to exist simply because no one knows the answer to it". Von Weizsäcker's thoughtful and statesmanlike discussion of some central aspects of recent German history (starting with

the 1944 bomb plot undertaken by anti-Hitler circles to which he belonged) was written while he was Mayor of West Berlin. It gains in interest through his recent election as President of the Federal Republic: observers will be especially interested to see how far he can use the representational possibilities of his new office to promote the reconciliation between Eastern and Western Europe for which he pleads so eloquently in these pages.

The collection of essays edited by Klaus Weigelt of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation deals with "the German question" at a different level, but still an interesting one: an exercise in *haute vulgarisation*, this survey of "Homeland and Nation: on the History and Identity of the Germans" deals with these basic concepts in a way designed to improve German citizens' awareness of the relationships between state and nation, East and West, Federal Republic and Europe. Non-Germans who can read the language will learn a good deal from these lucid and balanced chapters.

The French have always, for obvious reasons, tended to react to any indications of a revival of the *iniquités allemandes* with particular concern. In contrast to much alarmist French speculation about the growth of "national-neutalist pacifism", Dr Renata Fritsch-Bournazel and her co-authors, in a study published by the Fondation pour les Etudes de Défense Nationale, present an objective and well-documented account of the subject. They analyse very perceptively the tensions arising from Germany's position "au coeur de l'Europe" (echoes of Madame de Staël's classic *de l'Allemagne*), and they bring out the high degree to which Germany's internal stability depends on the structure of NATO and the European Community—and also, importantly, for all of us, vice versa.

## A growing capacity to harm

Peter Pulzer

GORDON A. CRAIG  
*The End of Prussia*  
The Curti Lectures, 1982  
102pp. University of Wisconsin Press. £14.25.  
029907307

Prussia is an idea whose time has gone; hence, possibly, the current revival of interest in it. There is something palpable about a polity whose history is complete and about a civilization that has come to a full stop. At its funeral there are mixed feelings. When the Allied Control Council pronounced their retrospective death sentence on February 25, 1947, "in the interests of preservation of peace and security of peoples and with the desire to assure further reconstruction of the political life of Germany on a democratic basis", they spoke for a wide consensus. Any mourners would have had to be discreet.

After the funeral there is a period of repression. The past that Prussia represents is too painful. For some—probably for most—it loomed as one of the contributory causes of the catastrophe, with its love of authority and its addition to violence. For others—it is difficult to guess how many—it was a distant vision of a world still in one piece. Either way, it does not bear thinking about.

The sons, it is said of American immigrants, want to forget, the grandsons want to remember. So, too, it seems, do the exiles from Prussia. The past few years have seen a flood of books, for the study as well as the coffee-table, and revival of public interest that culminated in the great Prussian Exhibition in Berlin, in 1981, with which Gordon A. Craig was associated. Why the revival? In part, no doubt, a shift of fashion. Nothing stays "out" for ever and the flux and reflux of fashion are fairly indiscriminate. We have, after all, had a *Hilfer-Welle* as well as a *Preussen-Welle*. But one can think of two other, more legitimate reasons for the revival of interest in Prussia. The passage of time has lifted a taboo, making Prussia once more a fit topic for conversation. The second is that nostalgia implies a discontent with the present.

Prussia is a crucial factor in the definition of Germany's national identity: it is both an obstacle and an aid. Historically, as Professor Craig shows in the third of his four lectures, it confused the issue in the course of trying to resolve it. Its leaders tried to create a new Germany in 1871 without sacrificing the old Prussia; and many of the new Germany's citizens thought there was too much of the old Prussia to make the Empire credible and acceptable. Wilhelm I acknowledged the ambiguity of his role when he confessed to Bismarck that the day of his coronation as Emperor would be the unhappiest of his life.

But in retrospect Prussia helps to redeem German self-esteem and the German sense of culture, as opposed to political unity. It can stand as an example of "the other Germany" of Protestant virtues as against materialist excesses, of Weimar democracy and resistance to Hitler. Above all, its territory and heritage straddle the frontier of the two Germanies. The DDR, as well as the Federal Republic, now celebrates its Prussian past: Sans-Souci has been restored, Frederick the Great is back on his horse in Unter den Linden, Scharnhorst has rated a television serial and even Bismarck is on the way to rehabilitation.

So, for the first time ever, we can see Prussia in perspective, *sine ira et studio*, and that is what Craig helps us to do in these beautifully crafted lectures. He presents his subject through the eyes of, of eight protagonists, grouped in pairs, each of whom had a certain idea of Prussia: the reformer Stein and his opponent Marwitz, the romantic Bettina von Arnim and the realist Bismarck, the fastidious Theodor Fontane and the bombastic Wilhelm II, and the two incompatible democrats, Otto Braun and Konrad Adenauer.

All fall into that era which Craig defines as the end of Prussia, a process rather than a single event that began for him with the defeat by Napoleon's armies at Jena in 1806—the first, deadly symptom, of that unPrussian quality, complexity, for which her leaders in later decades sought compensation with a variety of

other unPrussian qualities. It is an interesting thesis, though it restricts the era of the true Prussia to a rather short span of its history as a state. If we agree that Prussia as a European power, with its characteristic social-military structures, does not appear before the beginning of the seventeenth century, then we are left with about 200 years out of the 500 that followed the accession of the Hohenzollerns.

That is not, in itself, a fatal objection. Perhaps slightly less convincing are his assumptions, or the assumptions of his witnesses, about discontinuities between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. A great many of their criticisms of the Prussia of their day one may assent to. Bettina von Arnim thought the plight of the poor was due to the indifference of the bureaucracy and the Church. Fontane saw that behind the landowners' prattle about duty and honour there lay naked self-interest: "Prussia, and to some extent all Germany, is sick because of its East Elbians . . .". Why does Germany make such a bad impression in the world? Because "thousands of these personalities from the stone age are running around". But when von Arnim exonerates Friedrich Wilhelm IV with "the evil intrigues that encircle the lofty spirit of a prince" and Fontane catalogues the virtues of the old-style Quitzows and Yorck von Wartenburgs, are they talking about a Prussia that ever really existed, or is it yet another mythical golden age with which to belabour the pinchbeck of the present?

That Prussia had been corrupted by success, a recurring theme in everything Fontane wrote, was undeniable. Greed and conspicuous display affected all classes, not just the *nouveaux-riches*. Military prowess degenerated into *Schnelligkeit* (flashiness), landownership into tariff lobbying. There was, above all, the baneful influence of Bismarck. In vain can one point out that after 1871 he pursued policies of peace, balance and restraint. What the world remembered was the "demonic un-what is evident to us is how much of that realism was. Blood and iron alone do not decide the great questions of the hour. A state's power and a statesman's influence are also determined by the trust that they and their intentions inspire, by what today's jargon calls "credibility". This Bismarck lacked, having deliberately thrown it away.

But did Frederick the Great enjoy more of it, and did he believe any less in blood and iron? Were his officials less arbitrary than Wilhelm II's, or his officers less arrogant? If he was indeed the first servant of his state, who wrote out the terms of the contract? What was the difference between the Prussia of 1780 and that of 1880? Was there degeneration of merely greatly increased capacity to do harm?

In many ways the most tantalizing lecture is the last, which deals with Prussia without the Hohenzollerns. The army, the bureaucracy and the landowners, as everyone knows, survived, so the departure of the monarch did not change everything. Nevertheless, was Prussia after 1918 not an anachronism? For Otto Braun, the farm-workers' leader from East Prussia, and Prussia's Social Democratic prime minister for most of the Weimar Republic, a democratized Prussia would be a bulwark in the defence of a democratic Germany. Konrad Adenauer, chairman of the shadowy Prussian state council, was unconvinced. Alone among Craig's eight witnesses he wanted neither to conserve nor to reform Prussia, but to abolish it. Significantly, his reasons had as much to do with foreign as with domestic policy. The creation of a Rhenish state within the Reich would not only reassure Britain, but "would demonstrate to France that the rightfully feared Prustate would no longer exist", he said in 1919—an outlook that bears remarkable similarity to what Adenauer helped to enact thirty years later. It is vain to rewrite history, vain still to suppose that one decision, taken differently, might alter the whole course of human events. But one is tempted to wonder whether, if Prussia had ended sooner, Germany might not have lasted longer.

In the end, Prussia went when it did—gone, but no longer forgotten. We are all indebted to Gordon Craig for his reminder of its rich and ambiguous history.

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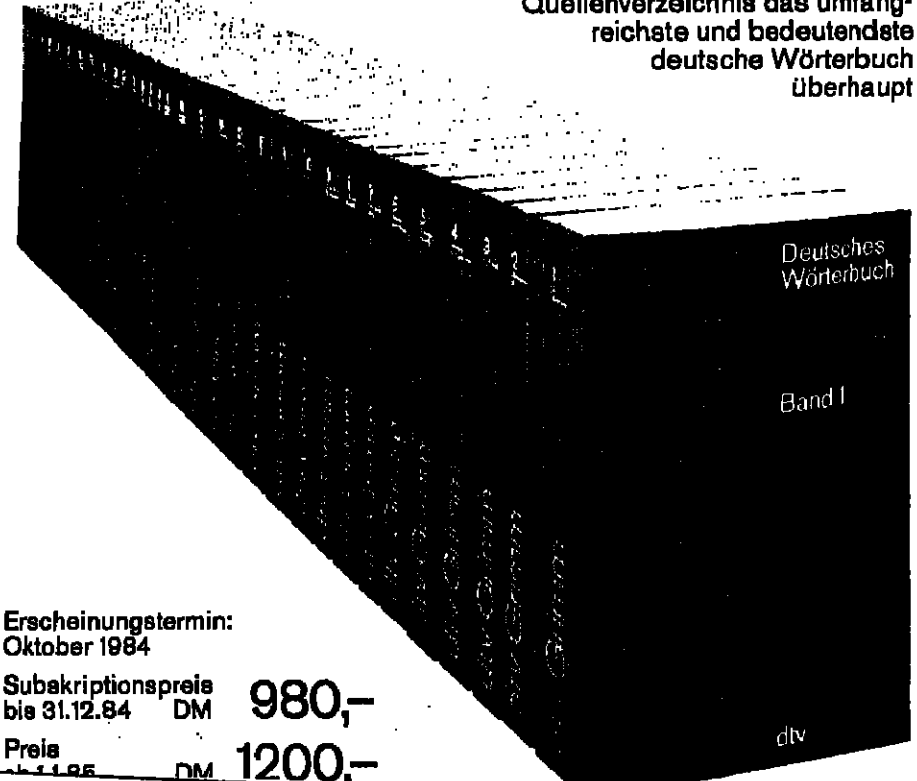
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## Among the men of violence

Philip French

WILLIAM KENNEDY

*Ironweed*  
227pp. Viking. £7.95.  
0670401765  
*Legs*  
317pp. Penguin. Paperback, £2.50.  
0140064842  
*Billy Phelan's Greatest Game*  
282pp. Penguin. Paperback, £2.50.  
0140063404

Several of the most interesting new writers in the United States over the past dozen years have been exploring the lives of hyphenated Americans on the underside of decaying northern cities that have not, in this century at least, attracted the attention of literary men the way New York, Chicago and Los Angeles have. The former Massachusetts district-attorney George V. Higgins has opened up the world of loquacious, foul-mouthed Boston-Irish crooks, cops, priests and politicians. Elmore Leonard, after years spent labouring in the vineyards of pulp fiction, is now being acclaimed for his laconic thrillers about Italian and Irish low-lifers migrating between Detroit and Miami. And the one-time newspaperman William Kennedy, also turning to fiction in early middle-age, has embarked on a cycle of novels that seek to aggrandize the seamy side of his native Albany, the once fiercely proud, now run-down capital of New York State, located 150 miles north of Manhattan on the Hudson River, and in the nineteenth century a major staging-post for immigrants heading west.

Virtually all of Kennedy's characters are Irish-Americans who have kissed the Blarney Stone by proxy, and he launched his dance to the muzak of crime in 1975 with *Legs*, a racy fictionalized life of the mad, bad and dangerous Prohibition gangster Jack "Legs" Diamond. A lecherous, silver-tongued killer, often and erroneously thought to be Jewish (his Irish extraction, born in Philadelphia as John T. Noland in 1896, and murdered in an Albany rooming-house in 1931 at the age of thirty-five while attempting to make himself king of the Catskills).

In *Legs*, four Irish-American octogenarians assemble at an Albany bar in 1975 to reminisce about the Jack they knew in more ebullient times. They are a fair cross-section of Kennedy types – an ex-madam, a former crime reporter, an ancient bartender, and the book's principal narrator, Marcus Gorman, a successful criminal lawyer so excited by the glamorous world of crime that he thought his dreams of bourgeois success well lost when a promising political career was blighted by associating with Diamond. To Gorman, *Legs* was "one of the truly new American Irishmen of his day: Horatio Alger out of Finn McCool and Jesse James, shaping the dream that you could grow up in America and shoot your way to glory and riches". He is "an ancestral paradigm for the modern urban gangster". Watergate and *The Godfather* were very much on America's mind when *Legs* appeared, which occasioned a crucial comment from Gorman:

I don't want to trivialize Jack's achievement by linking him to lesser latter-day figures such as Richard Nixon, who left sufficient history in his wake but no legend: whose corruption, overwhelmingly venal and invariably hypocritical, lacked the admirable white core-fantasy that can give evil a mythical dimension.

The second novel in the cycle, *Billy Phelan's Greatest Game*, published in 1978, focuses on a professional gambler, pool-player and bowling champion. The year is 1938 and the boss of the Albany political machine, Charles McCall, has his son kidnapped while a rigged election is in progress, and the crime-busting WASP Tom Dewey is threatening to clean up the state. Pressure is put on the hero, Billy Phelan, to discover whether a Jewish gambler of his acquaintance is involved. He refuses to act as an informer and is made a social pariah, banned from every bar, pool-hall and card-game in Albany by the victim's father. Eventually a star local journalist, Martin Daugherty, intervenes, and with the assistance of Damon Runyon gets a column into an Albany evening paper that vindicates and reinstates Billy. The book has an epigraph from Huizinga's *Homo*

*Lutens* and the title refers equally to an epic bowling contest Billy engages in and to his holding out against the political bullies.

The latest book, *Ironweed*, continues from, and overlaps with, *Billy Phelan's Greatest Game*. It tells in discursive form the life story of Billy's father, Francis Phelan, who at the age of fifty-eight has returned to his family after a twenty-two-year absence. Francis was a radical firebrand at the turn of the century, and a lethal stone, that he threw with the accuracy that was later to make him a baseball star, killed a scab during the 1901 Albany trolley-car strike. A bloody riot is triggered off, sending Francis into middle-western exile. He returns to marry and raise a family, then flees again in 1916 after accidentally killing his two-week-old son. His life thereafter is that of a wandering celtic hero, though one very much coloured by his times.

Certain characters recur in the books, most notably the McCall family of political forces and the lawyer Marcus Gorman, who having dominated *Legs* makes fleeting appearances in *Billy Phelan* and *Ironweed*, successfully defending Francis Phelan on a charge of voting twenty-one times in the same election by using the cheap courtroom tricks that had kept Diamond out of gaol. And we become familiar with the city's geography and cherished landmarks, like the plush Kenmore Hotel and the public park that boasts statues of both Robert Burns and Moses. Kennedy is fascinated and appalled by the history of Albany, and is proud of its literary associations with Melville and Henry James as he is of the men of violence who gathered there.

What holds the books together so far is a controlling vision of American society, or at least the Irish contribution to it, that is a curious mixture of warped idealism, mysticism, a need to create legends and heroes, and a notion of transcendental style that is contained in the concept of having "class". The chief protagonist of each book is thought of as being touched by magic. The gangster Jack Diamond, who may have been the model for his fellow Irish-American Scott Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby, has miraculously survived a succession of ambushes that have left his body a battleground of wounds. The journalist Martin Daugherty treats Billy Phelan as an existential hero, and Daugherty's playwright father, in his day the peer of Eugene O'Neill, wrote a play about the 1901 strike called *The Car Barn* that was inspired by Francis Phelan. Diamond, Francis Phelan and his son Billy are violent, destructive men, in flight from an oppressive, guilt-ridden religion, and from that cloying domesticity created by women who see themselves as upholders of proper Catholic values.

Kennedy is aware of the dangers of his enterprise, and the observer of his most unlikely hero asks himself, "Martin Daugherty, why are you so obsessed with Billy Phelan? Why make a heroic *picaresque* out of a simple chump?"

Daugherty is blessed with a form of double vision rather like that possessed by the extraterrestrial in Nicolas Roeg's film *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. Not only can he foresee the future but the past is so real that palpable images of it haunt him as he walks around town. Somewhat folksier is the gift of Francis Phelan. Prematurely senile at the age of fifty-eight, he has conversations with his infant son and other inhabitants of Albany Catholic cemetery. His behaviour is easily excused because the corpses talk among themselves, and we are reminded of the scene in the New England graveyard that ends Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*. There are also strong resemblances between *Ironweed* and Wilder's novel. *The Eighth Day*, where a mid-western miner sets off on a lifetime's wandering exile after being off on a lifetime's wandering exile after being the accidental agent of a man's death in 1902. It is indeed possible that Kennedy is bringing back the all-American feyness, sentimental fatalism and woozy rhetoric that made Wilder so popular some forty years ago.

So far Kennedy has written, and occasionally over-written, some eloquent chapters of imaginatively over-written, some eloquent chapters of imaginatively over-written, some eloquent chapters of imaginatively over-written. His sense of place is exact, his dialogue unerring, his big heart and robust humour endearing. The three books modify and fortify each other. They do not yet, however, as Saul Bellow appears to believe, constitute a substantial oeuvre, but they might well be the beginning of one.

## The rare creature's human sounds

David Coward

JULIAN BARNES

*Flaubert's Parrot*  
190pp. Cape. £8.50.  
0224022229

*Flaubert's Parrot* is an extraordinarily artful mix of literary tomfoolery and high seriousness. It deals ostensibly with the efforts of an amateur Flaubert enthusiast to identify the stuffed bird that served as a model for the parrot which hovers over the head of *Félicité* in the final paragraph of *Un Coeur simple*. Geoffrey Braithwaite, sixty-plus, widower, retired general practitioner and British down to his initials, commits himself to his quest with a self-deprecating yet embattled persistence. When the facts fail him, he widens the search. He writes learned notes about parrots in the work of Flaubert, ransacks the novels and correspondence for clues, and attempts to wrinkle out the mystery from the life and times, friends and enemies of a writer who hated intrusions into his private life. When this too fails, Dr Braithwaite is led to wondering how the past – any past – may be truly grasped. The present treats what has been like a poor relation, adopting a superior stance and assuming that fatness a hundred years ago, or the colour of redcurrant jam, were then what they are now. He writes to a jam manufacturer for expert testimony and gets a perhaps. This is all he gets too from Flaubert scholars who murder as they dissect.

But the past is only one aspect of truth. What is truth? For instance, you can look at Flaubert from many angles and each angle will tell you something. Dr Braithwaite collects views of Flaubert – from museums, from critics, from his contemporaries. He visits the shrines at Rouen and Croisset. He tries to get inside Louise Colet. He even tries to be Flaubert by writing his own *soit-disier* based on the *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*. But all his angles do not add up to an angle. How many half-truths are needed to make the whole truth? The truth about Flaubert is uncertain and each certainty is certain to be undermined by a coincidence or an irony.

Why then does he persist? Dr Braithwaite fills his head with parrot squawks because his mind is preoccupied by another, more immediate problem. He is a discreet and reticent man who does not find it easy to speak of himself. How shall he make a meaning of his married life, of his wife's death, if simple truths about jam and stuffed birds elude him? Mrs Braithwaite was a good wife but not faithful: no Emma Bovary, but a careless and bruisable suburban adulteress who never quite showed him up but ultimately let him down. Now it's over and he wonders what love is, what truth is, what the past is. Flaubert got it right but what precisely he got right Dr Braithwaite finds it difficult to say – and even Flaubert himself was never too sure. In one sense, the quest is a form of therapy. In another, it is a restatement of old questions. To look no further: what exactly is Flaubert's parrot?

### Frankenstein

Or The Modern Prometheus

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT SHELLEY

Illustrated by Barry Moser. Afterword by Joyce Carol Oates

Mary Shelley's classic tale of moral transfiguration is given a startling new dimension in this California edition of the Pennyroyal Press *Frankenstein*. Avoiding the conventional image of Shelley's "monster", Moser's brooding and foreboding woodcut illustrations bring out the psychological essence of the book and allow us to discover the work anew. In a vivid sequence of illustrations we witness the gradual shaping of the monster from the darkness – remaining partially obscured until over half way through the book he is suddenly revealed in several horrific close-ups in which yellow and then red are added to the established black and white. After these shocks, the monster then disappears until we see him again at the very end of the book in a stunning blue death mask. The overall effect of Moser's unique art is to make this the most powerful edition of Shelley's masterpiece.

December c.227.15 Hardback 272pp illus. 0-520-05281-1

It is, of course, the creature from Flaubert's story. Unless it is the stuffed bird at the museum in the Hôtel-Dieu at Rouen. Or that slightly less intimidating rival exhibit at the Croisset pavilion. That is, if it isn't the good doctor himself, *Flaubertus redivivus*. After all, he has a Flaubertian eye for irony and the grotesque, and he willingly embraces the Master's view that the human race is irredeemably stupid. Still, a coincidence or an irony all too easily knock him off his perch, and besides, he has a pawky individualism which makes him his own man. In that case, shall we say that the parrot is Life which repeats and mimics itself just as episodes in Flaubert's life parrot his work? If not, then it is Language: the choicest words are not much better than the chatter of this "rare creature that makes human sounds" and mocks with gaudy, ghastly parodies our attempts to move the stars to pity. But this reads like a bitter and defeated description of the writer as "a sophisticated parrot". Perhaps then we should simply accept what Dr Braithwaite says – that it is "a fluttering, elusive emblem" of Flaubert's voice. Yet we remember the Master's mistrust of metaphor, and in any case, critics, curators, the nineteenth century, our own times, you and I all hear different voices. The clever reader will conclude that the parrot of the title is not any one of these, but all of them. There are as many parrots as there are readers. Or Flauberts.

Dr Braithwaite, who can be very sharp-tongued about critics, would not be satisfied with as little. He persists in his search for truth not as an intellectual exercise but out of personal need. In this sense he is that old-fashioned thing, a scholar who seeks knowledge for its own sake and for what it may do to make him wise. So very different from the modern version, the academic researcher who, self-regarding and self-advertising, churns out footnoted, deadening articles each constituting a professional leg-up and each banging another nail in the coffin of understanding. Dr Braithwaite would not be happy with the multi does it dilute and disperse the truth he seeks but it stems directly from the unconquerable *belise* which Flaubert himself deplored. It is a fancy answer, an instant, kwik-brew, identikit, "all you need to know about Flaubert to know as much as the next person" answer. Dr Braithwaite can be fey: self-mocking he covets a page of *TLS* glory and introduces us to an American scholar who is pathologically scrupulous in the matter of literary ethics. But he is wary of the professionals – he is dreadfully rude about Enid Starkie – and he positively smites the philistines of modern fiction who take all the short-cuts and massage the prejudices of their readers. Gleeefully appointing himself "a dictator of literature", he imposes bans and quotas on campus novels, growing-up novels, novels set in South America, reworkings of the classics, the theme of incest, tales of natural savagery lurking beneath the veneer of civilization and others besides, because a cliché is a particularly raucous squawk and as untruthful as the importance given by critics to an author's mistakes. He is furious with Dr Starkie for accusing Flaubert of inconsistency in describing the colour of Emma Bovary's eyes. He exults when he in turn points out that the portrait of Flaubert "by an unknown painter" which serves as a frontispiece to her *Making of the Master* (1967) is in fact a painting of Louis Boulle.

What then are we to think when the scrupulous scholar is careless with the date of Flaubert's earliest surviving composition? When the dictator of literature constructs a reworking of Louise Colet's view of Flaubert? When the exact stylist asks, anent the sexual irregularity of the nineteenth century, "who shall escape whipping"? Mistakes or omissions? For Dr Braithwaite is nothing if not playful. He devises programmes for researchers ("Pets at Croisset", "The Ethics of English Governesses Abroad") and sets an examination paper for his reader. He makes jokes and he plants seeds – an image, a quote, a thought – which sprout at a later point in his story, catching us unaware, hitting us with an artful coincidence or a prepared twist of irony: irony does not exist without an irony. What then is the truth about Dr Braithwaite?

He is a man who sees quite clearly that the past is elusive and truth ungraspable: behind every parrot there is another parrot. Like Flaubert, he recognizes that the joke is on him and he accepts the fact with modesty and, if only for the sake of good manners, with dignity. Happiness lies in anticipation and in the memory of anticipated happiness. His quest ends in farce – the ironic thing about truisms is that they are true – but he has gained enough wisdom from the parrots he has scrutinized to know that the joke is cosmic, that it is played on him as it is played on Flaubert, Mrs Braithwaite, critics, curators and parrots. The quest's the thing. If he were a religious man, he would surely quote Pascal: he who seeks has found.

## Trans-European

Ian Bell

JACQUES RÉDA

*L'Herbe des talus*  
216pp. Paris: Gallimard. 75 fr.  
21070701468

*L'Herbe des talus* is a whimsical succession of personal experiences remembered from Jacques Réda's boyhood and, so it would seem, his mid-twenties. There is nothing dramatic or unusual about them beyond the charm of their telling. The book begins with a reflection in free verse on his father's grave on which in her own lifetime his mother had already had her name engraved; and it ends with a skillfully constructed sonnet which he calls "Tombeau de mon livre". In between are reminiscences of his youthful sports and ambitions, his encounters with ordinary and not so ordinary people and the insights he has come to in the course of his travels, first in widely scattered parts of

But while he is no creature of Pascal's are we to conclude that he is Julian Barnes's parrot? The author throws open the doors, disowns the translations from the French which are the work of an elderly general practitioner and then removes himself from the proceedings without even the faintest cry of "Geoffrey Braithwaite, c'est moi". Even so, there are unsevered umbilicals. Barnes's new novel develops themes and techniques from his two earlier books. The second, *Before She Met Me*, dealt with adultery-in-the-mind and despair. The hero of the first, *Metroland*, plans to attach to the clever-clever title of *Splinters*, elusive prose-poems which will trade moodily on "resonance, that most twentieth century of techniques". Barnes's latest is an *After She Left Me*, and a *Vade-Retroland* for the clever-clever, the merely moody, the sardonic and the flip. But if it is non-Baudelairean and unashamedly Flaubertophile, it positively jangles with cross-fertilizing, self-seeding, memory-jogging, imagination-releasing resonances. Phrases, images, quotations, incidents recur, and come at you like your own memories.

*Flaubert's Parrot* is sober, elegant and wry. It works as literary detection, literary criticism and literary experiment. It tells good stories and deals with ideas empirically, in the British way, for this is a very Anglo-Saxon book. The modern British novel finds it easy to be clever and comic. Barnes also manages that much harder thing: he succeeds in communicating genuine emotion without affectation or embarrassment. Like the Julien of Flaubert's story, he has great compassion for the quietly desperate man whom he ferries between France and England, past and present, art and life, pessimism and stoicism. In an age which insists that every problem has an economic, political or technological solution, Barnes has the courage and good humour to remind us that there are questions to which there are no answers.

Greece and the Scottish Highlands, and into obscure recesses of capital cities – London and Vienna, Athens and Prague, Rome and Budapest.

Réda's allusive, and sometimes hermetic style transfigures even the most earthy of the characters he recalls: the monosyllabic Mrs Henderson of Garve is not likely to be forgotten by the reader any more than by the writer. He seldom refers to other writers, but at the head of one chapter is a short quotation from Valéry Larbaud, and in Jacques Réda, now in his mid-fifties, there lurks the youthful restlessness of Barnabooth, exemplified by his now (alas outmoded) delight in railway trains.

Brenda R. Silver's *Virginia Woolf's Reading Notebooks* is a descriptive catalogue, indicating (with examples) the contents of the *Notebooks*, and not, as it was described in John Batchelor's review (*TLS*, August 10), an edition.

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# Irresistibly rising

Norman Hampson

JEAN TULARD  
Napoleon: The myth of the saviour  
Translated by Teresa Waugh  
470pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £14.95.  
0 297 78439 0

It was a good idea to publish an English translation of Jean Tulard's *Napoleon*, but not one like this. Even by present-day standards the proof-reading is exceptionally sloppy and there are mistakes all over the place. The printers have a curious affection for 1880, which is given as the equivalent of the year VIII and also as the date of Napoleon's Spanish campaign. On the whole, though, one can deal with the misprints, which sometimes provide light relief, as when army corps become "crops", which is an original way of beating swords into ploughshares. More serious is the quality—or lack of it—of the translation. Place-names are sometimes anglicized and sometimes not. Readers are not likely to have much trouble with Gand, Damas, Saxe and the Escut, but the unwary may not recognize the Turkish Government as La Porte or realize that the *Section Lepeletier* has been confused with the man of the same name. Some of the mistakes are merely odd, like the "conventional regicide" or use of hot-air balloons to "lighten the ground", and one can amuse oneself by working out what they should have been. Others are misleading, as when *journaliers* become "journeymen" and war contractors "tradesmen", to cite two examples out of many more. Sometimes the translation is simply wrong: Augustin "de" Robespierre is said to have deprived Bonaparte of command of the artillery when he actually got him the job; Hoche is described as too old when he was too young. It is not clear whether the printer or the

another, the reader has a busy time and this is emphatically not a book that may be safely used by anyone without access to the original French text.

In so far as one can penetrate to Tulard's text, his biography provides a lively, if rather conventional survey of a period so complex as almost to defy compression within a single volume. The author is an acknowledged master of his subject and his encyclopedic knowledge allows him, time and again, to illuminate familiar events with judicious quotation from people who were there at the time. One of the most valuable parts of his book is the bibliographical commentary, on sources, secondary works and "open questions", attached to each chapter, where the full extent of his own expertise becomes awesomely apparent. It is not Tulard's fault if Napoleon himself remains as inscrutable as ever and the man remains hidden behind the perpetrator of events. What transformed the minor Corsican noble who shared his contemporaries' penchant for writing imitations of Rousseau, into the man who created an empire in his own image and led an army to Moscow, what happened to him and what it felt like to be Napoleon after having been Bonaparte, we shall perhaps never know. Tulard is neither an idolater nor a debunker. One senses that he is not very interested in Napoleon's *faits d'arme* and is content to treat him as a kind of personified historical force.

If one takes the merits of his book—and they are many, at least in the French text—and they are granted, one may still take issue with his method, which is characteristic of a good deal of French historical writing. To present history as a developing consensus, rolling towards the solution of such "open questions" as have not yet been satisfactorily solved, conveys a misleading impression of the subject as akin to the physical sciences. There are more open questions than are dreamed in of Tulard's philosophy. His whole book rests on the assumption that the gains, they turned to Bonaparte.

When Napoleon abandoned them in pursuit of his imperial dreams, they deserted him and he fell. It may be so, but the explanation cannot be taken as self-evident and it needs much more substantiation than it gets.

Tulard's knowledge of the Revolution, in a sense peripheral to his subject, but also the foundation of his argument, is sketchy and looks old-fashioned to British or American eyes. The ubiquitous "bourgeois" are never defined. We are told that they are ungrateful and cowardly, which sounds more like inverted snobbery than dispassionate analysis. Although the explanation given for Napoleon's rise and fall is essentially economic, the actual description of the French economy seems tailored to fit a preconceived interpretation of events. Tulard tells us that, in 1794, the "bourgeoisie" had done well out of the revolution and "could look to the future with confidence". This is followed by a survey of France in 1799 which shows that much of the country, especially the Atlantic ports, which had been its most advanced economic sector, was virtually ruined. If a victorious bourgeoisie opted first for a military dictator and then put the

Bourbons back, so that it had to start its revolution all over again in 1830, it does not seem to have been very good at politics. In the same way, reading Tulard one is never quite sure whether the British economy was almost wrecked by the Continental System or too far ahead for French counter-measures to do it much serious harm. If the explanation of Napoleon's success and failure rests on an economic basis, this should have been demonstrated in detail instead of being more or less taken for granted.

Tulard himself, in his conclusion, suggests that political instability and the recurrence of various Bonapartist "saviours", from Cavaignac to de Gaulle, throughout modern French history, is due to "the disappearance of legitimacy on which the old monarchy was based before 1789". Once again, it may be so, but this explanation sits uneasily beside the economic determinism that has made the meaning throughout the rest of the book. As an account of Napoleon's career, Tulard's biography is admirable. As an explanation, it leaves us more or less where we started.

## Short of the ready

Malcolm Vale

HARRY A. MISKIMIN  
Money and Power in Fifteenth-Century France  
303pp. Yale University Press. £20.  
0 300 03132 7

It is perhaps a sign of our times that historians should seek "monetarist" explanations of political change. Harry A. Miskimin's interesting and provocative new book attempts to "clarify and bring to light a hitherto hidden dimension of money supply to the course of French political history." He divides his book into two distinct parts: 121 pages of text to 163 pages of statistical tables. Records of Mint production kept by the Valois monarchy between 1395 and 1495 form the major sources of his evidence. He is well aware of the dangers inherent in the use of this material, which is incomplete and often unrepresentative of more general movements of bullion, but he nevertheless sees fit to ground his argument upon "a somewhat crude juxtaposition of mint output levels against contemporaneous political circumstances and events." The result is a highly speculative, and necessarily selective, interpretation of the supposed impact of monetary movements and bullion scarcity upon the complex political and institutional developments of the period.

Two fundamental problems confront the reader: first, how can we be sure that the suggested relationship between monetary movements and certain political developments is anything more than a contrived juxtaposition, devoid of any causal connection? Second, does the evidence which is presented here actually endorse the claims made on its behalf? Miskimin's analysis rests upon a certain interpretation of political events, around which the monetary evidence is then marshalled. This interpretation is, as he himself admits, lacking in originality (Chapter One) and is largely based upon the works of historians such as Calmette, Petit-Dutaillis, Gandilhon, Doucet and Perroy, who were writing between 1920 and 1945. Much water has flowed under the bridges of later medieval French history since that time, and a more evident and fruitful use (outside the Bibliography) of writings by Guenée, Contamine, Leguall, Cazelles, Chevallier and Favre; to name but a few, would treasure the reader. As it is, some traditional clichés about the rise of "absolute" monarchy, the economic "policy" of Louis XI (1461-83) and the "drey" and exhausting Italian war" are repeated as if they were proven facts. Monetary evidence thus enters the book in alliance with distinctly conservative, if not out-dated, interpretations of power-politics.

Professor Miskimin is a firm believer in the so-called "bullion famine" of the mid-fifteenth century. This belief tends to render his arguments more modelistic than they need to be. The role of credit finance, loans and securities

(such as the seizure of Jacques Coeur's assets in 1453) in the underwriting of royal ambitions is largely ignored, because these aspects of the financial system were seldom reflected in the records of the Mint. Miskimin's methods and convictions sometimes force him into a self-contradictory position. At one point, he states that "the connection between elevated mint production and major military encounters has, in my opinion, been established beyond doubt" while, two pages previously, he speaks of "extremely low levels of mint production in France, Burgundy and England at a time of decidedly major military recovery of Normandy and Gascony from the English (1449-53) and the Burgundian war with Ghent (1451-53)". Clearly the thesis does not always work, and an increasing scepticism overcame this reviewer as he read on.

Political and institutional historians, especially those of representative assemblies, are gently scolded by Miskimin for their neglect of monetary factors. Yet if the monetary evidence is so treacherously difficult to interpret, they may surely be absolved of guilt on that score. Monetary mutations and attempts by rulers to increase or control bullion flow were often employed as means to political ends in the later Middle Ages. In this analysis, however, political ends become subservient to forms of economic thinking more characteristic of the twentieth than the fifteenth century. This book sometimes lacks a certain sense of proportion, and it suffers from a lack of historical perspective. The practices which Miskimin seems to regard as especially significant in the fifteenth century can be traced back at least as far as the reign of Philip the Fair (1285-1314) and, in one instance, to that of Philip III (1270-85). The "first true sumptuary law having force throughout France" was not, as Miskimin believes, promulgated in 1485: an *ordonnance* of 1279 represented the first attempt by the French crown to regulate the dress and possessions deemed appropriate to various ranks in society. The techniques of coinage debasement and control of bullion flow out of the kingdom (to Rome, Avignon or elsewhere), moreover, were well-known from the later thirteenth century onwards. Louis XI's pronouncements, when seen in that light, assume a markedly conservative air.

*Money and Power in Fifteenth-Century France* is illuminating and instructive on the subject of money; but its analysis of power seems somewhat flawed. Miskimin's tables are likely to be the most valuable part of his book, because they provide a mine of information for economic and numismatic historians. It is, incidentally, unfortunate that the dust-jacket illustration is mis-labelled. Quentin Matsy's Louvre panel of a pawnbroker's shop has become "a Banker and his Wife" (1512), although the sitters are clearly engaged in monetary activity of a far humbler kind than that portrayed by the great banking house and royal financiers of the fifteenth century.

## From war to Welfare State

John Burnett

JOHN STEVENSON  
British Society 1914-45  
503pp. Allen Lane. £16.95 (paperback),  
Penguin, £2.95.  
0 7139 1390 8

Survey history is a notoriously difficult art-form, especially for a period in which so much change was packed into little more than a generation. Here, within the space of thirty years, were ten years of "total" war, the new phenomena of mass unemployment and a Great Depression set against rising material standards and the emergence of a consumer society for the majority of the population, the accession of Labour to political power, a General Strike and, not least, a revolution in social policy which culminated in the creation of the modern Welfare State—all this and more in

one, admittedly hefty, volume of 500 pages, is a tall order.

One problem is how to accommodate the sheer mass of detailed fact which recent scholars have assembled on particular aspects of the period: another is to strike the right balance between fact and analysis, between telling the reader "what happened in history" and making some interpretative sense and judgment about the course and causes of change. And all this compounded by the difficulty of knowing for whom The Pelican Social History of Britain is intended. Traditionally, the non-fiction Penguin was aimed at "the intelligent layman", the non-specialist who wished to be informed interestingly but not over-exposed to pure scholarship: nowadays, one suspects, many of them are graduates or university students who expect a more academic treatment than the general reader.

On the whole, John Stevenson's book succeeds well, sometimes very well, in steering a

middle course between the two readerships. There are some excellent chapters, particularly those on the Home Front during the First World War, on living standards and unemployment between the wars, on the decline of religious observance and the growth of leisure and the media. In these, Stevenson has the advantage of his own previous researches, with Chris Cook, for their *Social Conditions in Britain between the Wars*: elsewhere, he draws adroitly on the work of many other scholars, condensing a vast array of data into palatable portions. There is scarcely a word or a sentence in this big book with which one would want to disagree. Sometimes there may be rather too much detail for "the intelligent layman", while for students it is regrettable that the format precluded the use of footnotes or references, other than a slightly slender note on "Further Reading".

That said—and one could cite many examples of the well-chosen phrase, the curious statistic and the apt quotation—there are a few debits to be set against the credits. In a book so crowded with facts there must be some errors of commission or, at least, distortions arising from compression. It is incorrect, for example, to write that "one and a half million families . . . were rehoused by slum clearance in the inter-war years": there were one and a half million state-aided houses built between the wars, but only a small minority of these were for slum clearance, the great majority being for "general needs". A different example: in summarizing John Boyd Orr's *Food, Health and Income* Stevenson concludes that "only . . . a third of the population enjoyed a diet which met Orr's stringent requirements". What he does not say is that Boyd Orr, uniquely among the social investigators of the day, was applying an optimum standard of nutrition "such that no improvement can be effected by a change in the diet".

mean income levels of family units lower than the Supplementary Benefits standard.) Concentration on one sole objective aids clarity and rhetorical effectiveness. They argue convincingly that the prevention of poverty is and should be the principle aim of social security. More controversially, they write as if they believe that should be its only aim. Other aims which have concerned advocates and designers of social security programmes are either dismissed with the assertion that they are of less priority than pure poverty relief (and the implication that this means that they should not be pursued at all), or are caricatured.

The view that parents' obligation to support their children affects their fair net contribution to, or receipt from, the tax and transfer system whatever their income does not appeal to the authors, because parents have chosen to have sons and daughters. Nor do they accept that the state should, by provision of a pension scheme with benefits that are not withdrawn from those above a standard "distress level", help citizens to enjoy a standard of living in retirement near to that which they would have chosen if they had been able to allocate their lifetime incomes over their life cycle in an optimal way. Many will fail to attain such a standard of living in the absence of a state scheme, some because of myopia, some because of inadequacies of private sector institutions, such as pension schemes that make poor provision for job changers and provide pensions that fall rapidly in value in times of inflation. They also ignore the problem of child poverty caused by unsatisfactory distribution of income within the family, the risk of which is reduced by paying child benefit to the parent who is both more likely to be responsible for and purchases to meet the child's urgent needs and more likely to have insufficient money. They advocate payment of this benefit to the earning parent(s), on the grounds that "distribution of income between husband and wife is a matter for them rather than the Government".

It is not certain that if the social security system was reorganized as they advocate, and concentrated on the single objective of poverty relief, political willingness to raise the living standards of the poorest by increasing these "efficient" benefits would be much greater. It might be, as the authors believe. On the other hand, in several European countries there has been political willingness to spend a higher proportion of national product than ours on the social security system considerably less "efficient" than ours by the criterion of poverty relief—perhaps because other aims have been valued more highly.

The book is an interesting and important contribution to the debate on social security reform. Many of its suggestions will meet with approval even from those who disagree with the authors' view that those families with children and pensioners safely above the poverty line should get less than they do now in order that not only people below or near that line, but also comparatively well-off childless working adults, should get more, and who think it absurd to describe this as a view about the "efficiency" of the social security system.

Theodora C. Cooper

A. W. DILNOT, J. A. KAY AND C. N. MORRIS  
The Reform of Social Security  
166pp. Oxford: Clarendon Press. £10  
(paperback, £3.95).  
0 198 77262 2

This book, from the Institute for Fiscal Studies, is a clear and forceful argument for the replacement of almost all of the present British social security system by a variant of a social dividend scheme. The scheme was welcomed enthusiastically and mainly uncritically by the national press immediately on publication.

There is a lively account of the development of social security in Britain since the Beveridge Report, and an assessment of problems with the present system. The authors are in favour of a simple, complex and expensive administration, large numbers with incomes below Supplementary Benefit level mainly because they do not take up means-tested benefits to which they are entitled. A. W. Dilnot, J. A. Kay and C. N. Morris argue that a structure based on universal (non-means-tested) benefits and the principle of social insurance could not succeed as Beveridge hoped, for two main reasons. First, it would be impossible to identify in advance of decades of economic and social change all the distinct contingencies that might be significant causes of poverty, and provide insurance against them. Second, there has not been a political willingness to have taxes and contributions at the level that would be necessary to bring nearly everybody, by universal benefits, above the relative poverty standard which has, by overwhelming consensus (approved by these authors) lain behind the Supplementary Benefits structure.

Dilnot, Kay and Morris outline a single administrative structure that could handle both the assessment of personal tax liabilities and entitlement to most benefits, including means-tested housing benefits. This change should nearly eliminate the take-up problem, and reduce hostility to means-tested benefits. The structure they have designed is far more flexible than that proposed in 1972 for the tax credit scheme. Using data from the Family Expenditure Survey they show how, with this structure, a close approximation to the present pattern of redistribution could be produced. The poverty trap is doled up, so that no one could face a marginal tax and withdrawal rate as high as 100 per cent, though more than at present would face rates above 80 per cent.

Major distributive changes are then advocated. Mainly by changing flat-rate pensions and child benefits from universal to means-tested benefits about £10 billion could be saved. The authors would want to use about half of this sum to raise benefits and thus reduce by about 900,000 the number of families with incomes below 120 per cent of Supplementary Benefit. They would want to use the other half to reduce income tax.

The authors' assessment of the present system, and of the one they advocate, is governed by a single criterion: effectiveness in relieving poverty. The authors' view that those families with children and pensioners safely above the poverty line should get less than they do now in order that not only people below or near that line, but also comparatively well-off childless working adults, should get more, and who think it absurd to describe this as a view about the "efficiency" of the social security system.

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The volume predominantly contains articles written for the *New-York Tribune*, for *The People's Paper* and for *Reform*, including the well-known series of articles *Lord Palmerston*. Some items were newly discovered. Additionally, the volume contains Marx' polemic treatises *Der Ritter vom edelmütigen Bauernstein* (The Noble-Minded Knight).

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A central position in this volume is occupied by Marx' polemic pamphlet *Herr Vogt* together with related articles and statements in the German and English press. In addition it includes Engels' treatises *Savoyen, Nizza and the Rhine*, numerous articles from the *New-York Tribune*, and Engels' military treatises from *The Volunteer Journal*.

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John Burnett



# The dance of discontent

Douglas Dunn

IAIN CRICHTON SMITH  
The Exiles  
57pp. Manchester: Carcanet. £4.95.  
0856354953

JOHN MONTAGUE  
The Dead Kingdom  
96pp. Oxford University Press. £4.95.  
0192119613

Over the years, Iain Crichton Smith's poetry has increased in strangeness and beauty. He is a poet of his own discontents, but one who has submitted his unrest to the demands of the imagination.

In the spring, air returns to us wide, with a sense of windows and our ruinous virtues sparkle once more like old cans in a ditch.

Those old cans seem familiar from George Mackay Brown's poetry, but "wide, with a sense of windows" sings with the spacious lyricism that is the signature on Smith's best writing, just as "ruinous" carries a typical hint of chagrin.

Peter Levi - I think it was he - once remarked that "development" is a notion best left to describe the progress of minor talents, and that "growth" is a more apt description for the work of better poets. Certainly, each of Smith's books takes his work further, always with an unexpectedness or newness that seems an increase over previous writing in a more rounded sense than mere piecemeal augmentation of theme and style. The surprise and authority of these lines from "Always" are different, but not entirely so, from anything he has done before:

the late evening skies are lost sails  
beyond all feeling's mercy, beyond lights  
trembling and yellow of the unknown wake.

poetry at the limits of intuition and imagining. The second of the three "Snow Poems" is an apparently effortless art of wintry, elegiac and gentle speaking. Snow is a "spectral friend", the "water changer",

and therefore to the magic world akin here now then gone without the grief of longing leaving no will behind it in the rain,  
and not so human as the breath of roses,  
beyond regret or joy, what simply is,  
and then what simply was, and may return,  
but not a growth that is inevitable,  
more like a simple visitor or guest  
who has left the house before the rest awake.

"Half of this world I am, half of this dancing", Smith writes in his "For Poets Writing in English Over in Ireland". The acknowledgment connects Smith's Gaelic Scotland with the old and new Irelands of John Montague's poetry. Exile is a subject of both books, but where Smith's handling of the theme is general, and, perhaps, idealized, Montague's is drawn from an exact interaction of his family's history with the emergencies of Irish emigration. One recognizes the qualitative difference between Smith's sentiments, in, for example, the two poems called "Returning Exile", and those of "The Canadian Boat Song" (lovely as that old poem is). Yet his poems of exile suffer from a lack of focus or detail, and the suggestion to make here might be that an essentially lyric gift hazards too much when it encounters subjects whose implications are historical and social.

That talent for organization and the placing of parts which distinguished *The Rough Field* again underlies the success and interest of Montague's *The Dead Kingdom*. Compared to Smith's more intuitive poetry, Montague's skill in the making and adjustment of sequences might seem a shade too deliberate. One kind of poet precedes books and sequences with epigraphs, another recoils from the practice. Considered free of their sophisticated setting, Montague's poems are simple and

his father, relatives, childhood, the Troubles, places, mythology and ancient history are juxtaposed within five titled sequences and played off one against the other.

At times, the book seems intended to contrast an affectionate elegy for his parents with a bitter and reluctant mourning of the matter of Ireland. Intimate and public sorrows, private grief and public calamity, encourage an uncomfortable medley of feelings in a reading of *The Dead Kingdom*. The death of the mother seems a larger than personal loss, while the proximity of "Northern Express" (a description of an incident from Ireland's contemporary violence) to "Gravity", "Intimacy", "A Muddy Cup" and other personal poems is surely a deliberate play.

Where Montague's design fails is in those poems that inflate the feeling of the book as a whole rather than serve it. "Invocation to the Guardian" and "Deities" introduce an overblown faith in mystique and antiquity. It is almost as if they represent an effort to graft on the loftiness the plainer idiom of the rest of

## Angel of the apocalypse

Peter Redgrove

HENRY MILLER  
The Time of the Assassins: A study of Rimbaud  
163pp. Quartet. £7.95.  
0704324768

This book seems to have been curiously subverted. Henry Miller wrote it near the time of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the whole world seemed to him firmly in the grasp of the anti-poets, who wanted to die because they had never lived. Anthony Burgess, introducing this re-issue in 1984, updates the prospect of annihilation, saying that Miller "is using Rimbaud prophetic to deliver his own judgments on the collapse of the Western world". Though his temper that this is a doomsday essay: "Through Rimbaud, Miller delivers his apocalyptic judgment of the world."

Miller's essay is indeed rhetorical and rambling and sometimes difficult to pin down, but the message often comes through clear and strong as at least potentially positive. Rimbaud is "the Columbus of Youth... the one who extended the boundaries of that only partially explored domain... since from the beginning of history man has never enjoyed the full measure of youth nor known the limitless possibilities of adulthood. How can one... if one's energies are consumed in combating the errors and falsities of parents and ancestors... the false maturity of the civilised man...?"

The subversion is comically compounded by Miller himself. When I first read the essay in the *New Directions Annual*, Volumes Nine and Eleven, the two parts seemed exciting, important and vital, the first appearing more so than

the book resists. Not so, perhaps, the two other poems related to them, the panoptic "What a View", a more realistic soaring of imagination, and "The Well Dreams", which sets off the hidden laughter of earth and the nature of Ireland free of history and inhabitants.

Even a pebble disturbs that tremor laden meniscus, that implicit shivering. They sink towards the floor, the basement of quiet, settle into a small mosaic.

Without the contemporary hyperbole of "Deities", *The Dead Kingdom* would be wonderfully unified, its narrative movement, its marriage of public and private realms, of curse and blessing, little short of tremendous. I doubt if Montague has ever been so controlled and touching as he is here in such poems as "The Music Box", "Family Conference" and "The Locket". Melody and imagery may have been sacrificed to narrative and feeling, but Montague's art in *The Dead Kingdom* is to make us not miss them.

the second. Unfortunately they are now reprinted (as they were in the New Directions American edition), in the reverse order, which makes a considerable difference, as it gives the doubts of the middle-aged writer precedence over the energies of Rimbaud's strange, ur-domic enigma. The currying and power in the essay for me lies almost entirely in Miller's amazement over the youthful genius, which provokes him to male-menopausal despair: how could such a poet play thus fast and loose with his angelhood? Miller wrote "In Rimbaud, I see myself as in a mirror". But printed the original way round, with Rimbaud the reality and Miller the reflector, we glimpse the poet's revelation before we are overwhelmed by the novelist's sense of doom.

Miller says that Rimbaud is "like a saint in his own way, but with a high, cold, harsh, harsh knowledge and experience of sin." Miller could have opened Rimbaud to the contemporary punk spirit of youth of which the Frenchman ("In nothing was he more unfamilial with the language, didn't look like a posh restaurant-menu advertising unfamiliar foods. Anthony Burgess is uncharacteristically unhelpful by remarking that "Miller was not the brightest man who ever lived", and this puts a finishing touch to the series of depressions.

The enigma remains; it is still a disaster when one like Rimbaud, or for that matter Sylvia Plath, stops giving us what we need, for any reason; and it is true that the world finds it difficult to accede to the simplest of Rimbaudian propositions, "I am another... who can blame the wood that awakes as a violin?" That already has the ring of a video lyric, but "Ce n'est pas le rêve d'un hachischin, c'est le rêve d'un voyant."

## The Earthquake

The jacket of her chalk-stripe suit  
over a straight-backed chair,

her tie navy-blue  
rope-burn.

A cymbal-hiss  
from her eight-year-old's drum-kit?

A goosey saying Boo  
to some great event?

One delicately-tufted lynx's ear,  
the fibre-optics

of her hair.

Slowly last night comes back to him

The hacienda's frump  
of pampas-grass,

a pair of cryptic  
eagles guarding its front door.

Her arm goes out to check for rain -  
a shoulder-bruise

as from a rifle-butt -  
and finds Radio Eireanni.

Ireland has moved; they haven't.

PAUL MULDOON

# Scottish Renaissance man

James Campbell

ALAN BOLD (Editor)  
The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid  
910pp. Hamish Hamilton. £20.  
0241112206  
The Thistle Rises: A MacDiarmid miscellany  
463pp. Hamish Hamilton. £12.95.  
0241117114.

"My task is to be unpopular", wrote Hugh MacDiarmid to the Scottish Nationalist leader R. H. Muirhead in 1928, "a fighter - an enemy of accepted things." Until his death fifty years later, at the age of eighty-six, he lived up to his commitment, to the extent of using himself as his own target: "There is much in Hugh MacDiarmid's long poem *To Circumjack Cencras* which most people will deplore", he wrote under a pseudonym in 1930, "and a great deal, surely, that no one can justify."

The motive was not entirely perverse self-aggrandizement (though MacDiarmid was never short of that, in any form) but was part of a campaign to drag Scottish letters and affairs into the twentieth century. This struggle is inseparable from his actual poetic achievement; while MacDiarmid's propagandizing antics frequently inspired him to great feats of creativity, their intensity was often in danger of damaging the product. The description of him in 1953 as "the best poet in Scotland today... and also the worst" was well placed (and not one he disagreed with). As he put it to George Bruce that same year, his job was "to erupt like a volcano, emitting not only flame, but a lot of rubbish".

The purpose, basically, was to overwhelm by any means possible the kind of art with which Scotland was left while modernism took off in the rest of Europe. Not untypical of vernacular poetry at the turn of the century was David Royle's "The Pawky Duke":

There since was a very pawky duke  
Who owned a hoodie wi' a grain o' Dundee.  
A garden an' a rockery.  
Hech meal! The pawky duke!

Against this, MacDiarmid set articles and poems with titles such as "Modern Scottish Culture in the light of Dialectical Materialism", "Burns and Baudelaire", "In Memoriam James Joyce", drew up plans for a "Scottish Vortex" and formulated a Scottish aesthetic.

Alan Bold's huge edition of letters reveals the kind of energy with which MacDiarmid fulfilled his task. Writing to his former teacher, George Ogilvie, in 1916, he outlines a series of "Scotts Art Essays"; and in the week of his death in 1978 he found him planning a long article on the novelist Fionn MacColla, which is to be "one of the best things I've done". In between, he published approximately eighty books and pamphlets, and seems to have abandoned at least that many again. "I'm tackling a huge survey of the whole field of Scottish personality throughout the ages", he told Helen Cruikshank in 1940. "And besides that... a history of Scottish doctors and doctoring, a book on the Faroe Islands and a biography of John Maclean." A footnote mentions that none of these books materialized, a lament which recurs often.

Partly as a result of this reforming zeal, it is Hugh MacDiarmid the poet (and fighter) who

## Critical conditions

Andrew Wright

ANNE WRIGHT  
Literature of Crisis, 1910-22: Howards End, Heartbreak House, Women in Love and The Waste Land  
236pp. Macmillan. £20.  
0353275179

Anne Wright has acquainted herself with a number of recent works of literary theory, and brings new insights to the works treated here. Bradbury, Hagelton, Fussell, Kernode and others make a contribution to *Literature of Crisis, 1910-22*. Scholarly assiduity plays a welcome role as well; the manuscript sources have been consulted, the most authoritative texts have been employed, and the ex-

posed by this volume, rather than Christopher Grieve the man - though how much of his intimate self he was capable of exposing anyway is open to question. To David Daiches he confessed in 1975 that "although I have known a great number of people I have always avoided intimacy with them", and indeed the letters lack the kind of self-scrutiny which makes the letters of, for example, Kafka so compelling. And apart from references to his health and his finances (both in a permanent state of doubt) he kept his day-to-day concerns to himself as well.



Bold has arranged the letters by correspondent, rather than chronology, which gives the scheme a certain neatness, allowing us to watch the development of the poet's relationships, but which also causes repetition - like most letter-writers, MacDiarmid wrote the same thing over and over again. The footnotes are informative and useful, although there are some curious omissions, such as the numerous references to the *TLS*, the text (including many letters) to the *TLS*, with which he had a typically affectionate and aggressive relationship lasting half a century.

More than fifty recipients are listed, including, in addition to those already mentioned, Neil Gunn, Compton Mackenzie, Naomi Mitchison, Sorley Maclean, Sean O'Casey and two of his many publishers. A single letter to Ezra Pound is a disappointment, but there is an interesting correspondence with T. S. Eliot in *In Memoriam James Joyce*. Eliot published *In Memoriam James Joyce* and essays in *The Criterion* but could not persuade Faber and Faber to take on the longer work, in spite of his own appreciation of it as "a magnificent tribute to language... an astonishing piece of work". MacDiarmid remained grateful for the "chilly encouragement" (Eliot's phrase), however, and afterwards would wheel in Eliot in his own support when defending himself against detractors.

Yet, as an interview in *The Thistle Rises* reveals, he was not above putting him down in order to make a show. The same goes for many other friends, to whom MacDiarmid could be loyal and generous when it suited him,

but also irresponsible and even treacherous. "I do not attach the slightest importance to his work", he wrote to Neil Gunn of Compton Mackenzie, while apparently reading the latter's books (so he told him) "with very great interest, admiration... and sheer joy". When Lewis Grassie Gibbon, his collaborator and ally in the Scottish Renaissance, fell foul of the sales manager at Routledge, MacDiarmid aimed his sympathy where his own position was most likely to be strengthened as a result, kicking Gibbon in the teeth for the salesman's pleasure. (It didn't work, and in a series of which he was general editor the only title not to appear was his own.)

In the famous case of Edwin Muir, the letters show how violent his feeling against the author of *Scott and Scotland* actually was. In that book, Muir - until then another supporter of the Renaissance - expressed doubts about MacDiarmid's use of synthetic Scots and suggested that "a Scottish writer who wishes to achieve some approximation to completeness has no choice but to absorb the English tradition", arguing that the literary tradition in Scotland had reached an end. As if the thesis itself were not treachery enough, Muir used the Routledge series to present it. (No letters to Muir are included here, although there must surely have been some.) MacDiarmid ranted to his correspondents of Muir's "pretensions to creative artistry" and about being "disgusted" by his critical writings. The deeper the wound, the louder MacDiarmid protested that he hadn't been hit. In this case, his resentment may have been intensified by the fear that Muir could be right; thirty-five years after the quarrel began, in 1970, he wrote: "So far as a very large part of our own population is concerned the process of Anglicisation has gone so far that they are just utterly hopeless."

The "Reply to Edwin Muir" included in *The Thistle Rises* (actually snipped from the introduction to *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*) is less a reply to Muir than an exercise well as a selection of his best poems). Although he possessed a wide-ranging, acrobatic, relentless investigative intelligence, he was also a reckless thinker, borrowing the ideas of others and permitting personal grudges to cloud his critical faculty. His opposition to "accepted things", attractive though it often is, appears in less amusing when it comes down to this, in 1940: "if the French and British bourgeoisie win [against Hitler] it will be infinitely more difficult to get rid of them later", or when it comes to rejoining the Communist Party after coming to Hungary in 1956; or blaming Jews for economic ill; or asking "What matters? who we kill? To lessen that foulest murder that deprives / Maist men o' real lives?"

There is plenty more. The virtue of this collection of letters is that the poet, the revolutionary, and occasionally the man, line up side-by-side, so that, as well as being shown his heroism in a new context, we can also see the posturing of one page punctured on the next. There are (rare) moments of self-doubt: "I have written far too much", he admitted in 1970; but his achievement will be judged finally not only by his own literary work but, perhaps equally important, by what he has made possible.

there is the question of the possible readership for this study: is it intended for pupils who need to be reminded of the most celebrated lines of *Richard II*, or is it for advanced university students and such general readers as may like to link plot-making to the Apocalypse?

In some ways this study may be too ambitious. Other secondary sources might have been consulted: the argument about *Howards End*, centring on a shift from the realistic to the symbolic mode, would have been enriched by examination of *Aspects of the Novel* and P. N. Furbank's biography of Forster; and of the many commentaries on *Women in Love* and *The Waste Land*. Anne Wright has, no doubt wisely, chosen to eschew all but a handful; but it is more than merely disadvantageous not to have employed such sources as Leavis, on Lawrence and Helen Gardner on T. S. Eliot.

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## COMMENTARY

## A small world, and beyond

Harley Preston

Danish Painting: The Golden Age  
National Gallery

The National Gallery inaugurates its new Sunley Foundation exhibition space, not with a display extending its own comprehensive holdings, but with some eighty Danish oils from the Statens Museum for Kunst, the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek and the Hirschsprung Collection, which add the novelty of unfamiliarity. This Danish "Golden Age" falls between 1770 and 1850, and the exhibition presents a neatly cohesive, self-contained and intimate microcosm, compact and therefore readily seen and absorbed. Danish painting, it has been observed, glides easily from a secondary Neo-Classicism into a comfortable Biedermeier style with little influence of Romanticism – no excesses of *Sturm und Drang* intrude to ruffle the sanitized serenity of a complacently hermetic small world. There was the odd institutional fresco or decorative subject, but the complex and jangling polyphony of nineteenth-century iconography was stilled to just two basic and simple thematic strands – the domestic cabinet portrait and the naturalistic landscape, small, factual, often little more than a *pochade*.

The eccentric, perhaps naïve classicism of N.A. Abildgaard's Terence series, with paw-like individual actors strutting in Michel-angelesque postures on a stage set after Poussin, gives way to his portraits of more homely aspiration and family: Wilhelm Marstrand's Waagepetersen family group reveals precisely how such pieces were hung in a neat, provincial Empire interior. Danish art undoubtedly possesses throughout its own bland but delicate flavours. It makes its own quietly distinctive music of limited instrumentation in

Juel is the most obviously foreign-inspired, gaining his style everywhere, but never as Frenchified as his rather earlier counterpart across the Kattegat in Sweden, *le chevalier Roslin* who (like his countryman Wertmüller in his moments) became part of French *dix-huitième* portraiture. Unexpectedly, Juel's leaden-toned "A Thunderstorm Brewing behind a Farmhouse" seems almost like a tautened, more factual and down-to-earth Georges Michel.

French exemplars were always there and, most portraits show a varying degree of influence – a *beau idéal* of early French classicism may be glimpsed for comparison in a nearby gallery where the first David portrait to enter British public ownership is displayed. Christoffer Eckersberg, indeed, was taught by David for a while, and although Girodet, Gros, Gérard, even Ingres, were available to the Danes in Paris, their small portraits and interiors remind one more of someone like Boilly, stripped of his veneer of sophistication. Such portraits, ruthlessly objective in their charting of the ravages of age, are sometimes stiff and slightly gauche with more than a touch of the primitive (even in Eckersberg and the early Købke) which may lend them a special allure for modern eyes, while the more painterly, Dutch-inspired C. A. Jensen achieved a greater fluency of handling. Constantin Hansen's very serious group portrait shows Danish artists in Rome in 1837 as sensible, businesslike, well dressed and decidedly non-Bohemian, experimenting cautiously with Turkish coffee and long Oriental pipes while listening with half an ear to tales of the Near East recounted by a colleague in a fez, and is notably evocative of time and place. By contrast, the same artist's "A Recitation of 'Orlando Furioso' at the Molo, Naples", 1838, is awkward with its additive string of

Vesuvius spout simultaneously.

The archetypal presence of another "Golden Age", that of the seventeenth-century Netherlands, lurks behind the placid interiors and meticulously pellucid architectural landscapes, although at times it appears as if the Dutch were viewed through the eyes of a Drolling or a Turpin de Crissé rather than directly encountered. Better known internationally, however,



Jens Juel's self-portrait, c1773-4, from the exhibition reviewed here.

are the near shadowless, pastel-hued and high-keyed Roman landscapes, viewed as if in a vacuum, which remind outside critics of Valenciennes *esquisses* and the Corot of the early Italian tours, although such comparisons must not be pushed. Martinus Rørbye travelled further and his oil sketches of the Acropolis with their thick, creamy blond brush work,

despite to admire Horace Vernet especially. Counterparts to such scenes are found in the local views many artists – Eckersberg, Hansen, Rørdbye, Købke, Lundbye, Skovgaard and Dreyer – painted back in Zealand, equally bright and light-saturated, ensuring the momentary brilliance of brief, precious Northern summers. Deriving from a close visual analysis of nature, apotropaic in wish-fulfillment, these complacent, idyllic celebrations coincided with years of war.

The French influence, however, is probably less crucial than that of Northern Germany, for which Copenhagen was an art centre where Kersting, Friedrich and Runge studied. Christoffer Købke represents an apogee as a master at the fulcrum between past and future whose short lifespan (1810-48) marks the summit of this golden age, and who produced perhaps its most pervasive and haunting images. Marries, perfected by the founding father Eckersberg (including his unusual deck scene), followed by Kyhn, Kloss and Larsen, are as literal as their British counterparts, but add an extra gleaming spaciousness and luminous sheen.

With few uncomfortable rumblings of the imagination to disturb a scrupulously honest, coolly restrained vision, these earnest, slightly laboured, pasteurized glimpses of ordinary bourgeois and country life obviously hold an appeal for appreciative London visitors. The reticent charm lingers the more through being unforced, understated and almost diffident. A simple, straightforward catalogue by Kasper Monrad (272pp. £7.99, 0 901791 93 8) provides a useful souvenir with a lively historical survey from Henrik Bramsen. The colour of the plates is, unfortunately, rarely that of the pictures themselves, although the distinctive plum-bloom green and the mauveish waten of Købke's still, almost airless, lapidary masterpiece, "A View of one of the Lakes near Copenhagen", is admirably observed.

## A decade of new art

Iain Boyd Whyte

Berlin um 1900  
Akademie der Künste, Berlin, until  
October 28

"Berlin", wrote Robert Walser in 1910, "is like an ill-bred, insolent, intelligent youth; happily taking whatever suits him and throwing away the things he has become weary of. Here in the metropolis one is really conscious of the intellectual currents that ripple across the social life like waves in a bath." This youthful turmoil not only affected the arts, but extended to every aspect of life in the city at the turn of the century. In the three decades preceding the new century Berlin had become the capital and undisputed intellectual and scientific centre of the new German state, a booming industrial city, and an artistic magnet that vied with Vienna for the cultural leadership of central Europe.

The exhibition *Berlin um 1900* celebrates the life of the city between 1890 and 1900 – the heyday of its Wilhelmian splendour. Although it does not shun the conventional images of the Kaiser's Berlin as a city of Neo-Baroque facades, grand boulevards and monocled officers, the exhibition goes far beyond such stereotypes in both its scope and its organization. Over 1,700 exhibits are divided into three sections. The first documents the physical expansion of the city, its transport systems, the industrial boom, and the development of medical and scientific research. Between 1870 and 1900 the population increased from 824,000 to nearly two million, greatly stimulated by the expansion of the infant chemical and electrical industries. This new economic base is well documented by archival material from firms like Schering, Agfa, Siemens and AEG, and the parallel advances in medicine, chemistry and physics made by such leading figures as Robert Koch, Emil Fischer and Max Planck are also surveyed. Concluding the first section is a brief account of university life in Berlin, which includes a lovely cartoon by

Bruno Paul in which an ageing, obese and heavily scarred student tells his "Kommilitone": "I think I've almost completed my studies. Nothing makes me drunk any more."

The heart of the exhibition is the large second section, devoted to the arts. Here the vacillations, conflicts and paradoxes which typify the period are given concrete form, aided by the quality of the exhibits themselves and by the exemplary layout. The contrasts are very striking. Ludwig Noster's portrait of Kaiser Wilhelm II is set on a podium surrounded by palms, a suitably staid location for a monarch who was moved to damn modern painting as "gutter art". The regal gaze, however, is directly confronted by Munch's dandified portrait of Harry Graf Kessler against a swirling yellow background. The premature closure of a Munch exhibition in 1892 marked the beginning of a split between the conservative faction in Berlin art, led by the court painter Anton von Werner, and the modernists. This schism became total in 1898 when the Berliner Secession was founded following the rejection by the jury of the Große Berliner Kunstausstellung of a landscape by Walter Leistikow. In the current exhibition von Werner's "The Unveiling of the Richard Wagner Monument" is quietly rebuked from the opposite wall by the very same Leistikow landscape. Equally enlightening juxtapositions abound: Reinhold Begas's unbelievably Baroque monument to Kaiser Wilhelm I is followed by Messel's lucid modernist drawing for the Wertheim department store in Leipziger Strasse. Similarly, a points at a bust of Richard Strauss, while around the corner lurks Schönberg's setting of Richard Mahmel's poem "Erwartung". That vicious to the charms of bombast can be seen in Velde, which contains enough timber to build a small yacht.

The contemporary conflicts were not limited, however, to styles of art but also extended to styles of life. The cultural magnet of Berlin

also had a negative pole, which sent the artists and literati back to the land in search of social equality and harmony. The inherent contradictions of idyllic rural communes located within a short train-ride of Alexanderplatz are well documented in the exhibition. Particularly revealing is a page from Eric Mühsam's account book for the "Neue Gemeinschaft" commune at Schlagtensee, which records, among the eggs, milk and butter, a weekly consumption of 140 bottles of beer and 637 cigars. With so much alcohol and nicotine on their collective conscience, it is not surprising that many literati turned to cults like Theosophy and Monism for spiritual support, and surveys of the influence of Rudolf Steiner and of the Giordano-Bruno-Bund round off the second part of the exhibition.

The final section attempts the impossible and, predictably, falls short. It aims to recreate a picture of daily life in turn-of-the-century Berlin. There is a brief nod to the emergence of

organized socialism and the obligatory Hitler Zilla drawings depicting the unenviable lot of the urban working classes. The Berlin press gets a passing glance, as do the "Wandervogel" movement, the world of fashion, and the contemporary debate on the dangers of over-night stays. A highpoint in this slightly baffling survey is the retelling of the tale of the shoemaker Friedrich Wilhelm Voigt – the Hauptmann of Köpenick – using original police documents, contemporary press reports, and the special Köpenick issue of *Simplicissimus*. A scholarly, well-illustrated catalogue (522pp. Berlin: Nicolaische Verlagshandlung, DM32, 3 87584 134 4) completes an exhibition that is memorable not only as a dazzling account of the flowering of artistic modernism in Berlin, but also as a monument to the innocent optimism and vitality of the city of Berlin at the turn of a century in which it was to be successively terrorized, destroyed and divided.

## AUTHOR, AUTHOR

Competition No 194  
Readers are invited to identify the sources of the three quotations which follow and to send us the answers so that they reach this office not later than October 26. A prize of £20 is offered for the first correct set of answers opened on that date, or failing that the most nearly correct – in which case inspired guesses will also be taken into consideration. Entries, marked "Author, Author 194" on the Times Literary Supplement, Priority House, St John's Lane, London EC4M 4BX. The solution and results will appear on November 2.

1. Am stillen Herd in Winterzeit,  
Wenn Burg und Hof mir eingeschmeilt,  
Wie einst der Lenz so lieblich leucht,  
Und wie er bald wohl neu erwacht  
Ein altes Buch, vom Alter vernacht,  
Gab das mir oft zu lesen.

2. Doch an den Festen und Feiern,  
Wer hätte die Blätter da?  
Ihr leucht wohl über den Träumen,  
Der Blumen im Winter sah?

3. In diesem Wetter, in diesem Braus,  
Nie hat ich gesendet die Kinder hinaus,  
Man hat sie getragen, getragen hinaus,  
Ich durfte nicht das sagen.

Competition No 198

No solutions were submitted  
Answers:

1 CAIRO: that immense and sinister Woolworth's where everything is for sale – love, lottery tickets, clothes hangers, honour, justice, indecent postcards, bootlaces; disease – as much and as cheap as you like. The buyer goes mad with boredom and dullness. Christopher Isherwood, "Beetles" (from *Homunculus*).

2 They now entered the town, stunned by the noise and offended by the crowds. Instruction had not yet so prevailed over habit but that they wavered to see themselves pass undisturbed along the streets, and met by the lowest of the people, without reverence or notice.

Samuel Johnson, *Rasselas*, chapter 16.

3 But this stunted white town  
Is something in accordance with mundane conven-

Marcelle drops her Gallic air and tragedy suddenly strikes in Arabic about the face with the cabman, links herself so with the somnambulist and begins to be in all one, all as you have heard.

Keith Douglas, "Cairo Jag"

## Histeromanic happenings

Robin Briggs

JOHN WHITING

The Devils

The Pit, Barbican

*The Devils* in *The Pit* – the idea must have seemed irresistible, especially so when the opening night was 350 years almost to the day after the execution of the real Urbain Grandier at Loudun. Names and dates apart, what could be better suited to John Whiting's intense, claustrophobic historical drama than this tiny theatre in the round, deep under the Barbican? John Barton's new production for the Royal Shakespeare Company does its best to prove the point, with some committed acting and fine teamwork. The appalling scenes of cruelty and degradation with which the play reaches its climax do indeed provoke horror and pity, even though the director spares the audience a close view of the torture itself; Grandier's off-stage screams, and subsequent appearance as a bloodied, broken wreck, leave little enough to the imagination as it is. In contrast to some of the Jacobean tragedies with which *The Devils* might be compared, the horrors never seem gratuitous, not merely because we know that they actually occurred, but because they appear as the necessary result of the evil we have seen festering within the stifling little com-

munities of Loudun and its Ursuline convent.

Grandier himself is very much part of this evil. Arrogant, lustful, uncaring beneath his seductive manners, the curé is, as his friend the governor Jean d'Armagnac tells him, his own worst enemy. While it's easy to see Whiting's problems in cutting down Huxley's elaborate account, he did rather underplay Grandier's pride, his readiness to bring law-suits against his enemies, and his role as d'Armagnac's right-hand man in local politics. This is one reason why Peter McNery's accomplished performance tends, in the first half, to project a rather lightweight *courreur de femmes*, whose only real offence in his callous rejection of the pregnant Philippine Trincant, as an explanation for his wish to destroy himself, as an explanation for his rash behaviour, it appears no more than a passing moment of penitential self-disgust. Grandier's self-deluding justifications for such conduct as his simulated marriage to Philippine ring far truer, as a description of his state of mind, than this attempt to provide him with a superfluous general motivation. This is a rare instance where Whiting moves away from Huxley's book; a comparison of the two texts emphasizes how far, like the good script-writer he had by then become, he took his best scenes and much of his best dialogue from his source.

Fidelity to what is generally a very accurate historical account inevitably limits the dramat-

## A nuclear winter's tale

Peter Kemp

BARRY HINES

Threads

BBC2

The problem with *Threads* is that it is that it has to be written before the event (and, of course, before the event is actually nuclear). Hindsight is an option that may not be left open by megatonnage of missiles. Literature similar to that stemming from earlier hostilities seems unlikely to crop up in a post-nuclear climate. Where previous war writing derived from personal experience, there's now a need to draw largely on statistics and likelihood.

*Threads*, "The story of nuclear attack", written by Barry Hines and produced by Mick Jackson, exemplifies the resulting genre, where the strongest subject matter imaginable can get entangled with unfeeling stereotypes. Visually, the film is searing – especially in its flicker of frames showing everyday life exposed to nuclear glare. In the instant incandescence, milk bottles sag and liquefy. People even instantly blanched by the flash become retching, fried effigies. Shot after shot brands itself on the memory as crowds of characters are reduced to charcoaled horrors looming blackly out of niagaras of flame.

Around these scenes of holocaust, Hines assembles a twin thesis implied by his play's title: that society consists of web-like interconnections, and that its sustaining filaments are bound to break under nuclear assault. To demonstrate this, part of the film deploys near-documentary techniques: fearsome forecasts are printed out across the screen as a narrator supplies data about devastation. What this stresses is the massive scale of the bomb's repercussions. Wanting also to show the individual impact, Hines concentrates – in a fictional narrative – on two families.

It's here that *Threads* reveals itself as an unbroken development from his previous work – always concerned with squandered resources. Key depicted a boy whose talents were to be seized upon by a ham-fisted educational system. In *Looks and Smiles*, a young couple had their prospects blighted by the harsh winds of Thatcherism. In *Threads*, nuclear blast blazes potential. Opening with conception – a boy impregnates his girlfriend in a car – the film ends with a still birth (the daughter they've conceived delivers herself, thirteen years later, at a dead child in a world where everything seems aborted).

The initial episodes of *Threads* document in a grizzly, sympathetic way "Tahiti" from

Hines's earlier work, preparations for the couple's wedding. Their attempts to establish a home and family, though, take place against a background – on radio and television bulletins – of escalating international tension. Normally unknowingly going about its business while nuclear menace mounts – here, people feed the

dard opening in this genre. And, of course, Hines's handling of it over-employs warning symbols. The car in which the couple make love is perched on the edge of a cliff. Ironies clang in the dialogue: "Not the end of the world, is it?" Fatal inability to envisage what's in store is too stridently given voice: "Don't want the whole street blown up while you're away", a man yells, urging a neighbour to turn away the gas before evacuating his family. Better off the gas before evacuating his family. Better off the gas before evacuating his family.

As is customary in this genre, the work splits into two sections separated by the spouting of the mushroom cloud. Blinkered, pre-bomb complacency switches to an aftermath of bitter experience. Buildings and assumptions topple. Official directives on survival strategy – how to parcel up your family fatalities (wrap in polythene and "label the body with name and address"), and the like – emerge as about as helpful as tissue-paper in fending off a flame-thrower. The local Emergency Committee are entombed in their subterranean HQ under a collapse of rubble. Law and order also cave in. Troops are only seen in action against their own civilians.

Regression is presented as inevitable. The central figure, Ruth – powerfully played by Karen Meagher – stumbles back through debris, corpses and chaos to a Dark Ages where brutalized beings just about scrape a subsistence from the soil. And doubts are prominently raised about longer-term prospects by the final image of a baby, the result of rape, being born dead. Frozen on the screen, this terminal moment seems too symbolically statuesque, though *Threads* is most effective when making the flesh valuably cringe by realistic scenes that impress on it what it could experience.

Radio 3's new arts programme, discussed by Robert Hewison in "Behind the lines" last week, is to be called *New Theatre*.

## COMMENTARY

ist's own capacity for imaginative creation, and this no doubt explains why Grandier only really establishes his dramatic stature by his unexpected heroism when nemesis comes. As his accuser, the Prioress, Estelle Kohler dominates from the start; the small deformed body of Jeanne des Anges radiates nervous energy as she drives herself and her convent into a state of possession. Jeanne's inner tensions are relatively easy to understand, from the voluminous evidence of the exorcisms and her own autobiographical writings, so both author and actress may be thought to have had an easier task with her, but it is a powerful part, brilliantly acted here. Grandier's sensuality proves his undoing, because his well-merited reputation causes the frustrated nuns to make him the centre of their fantasies. This is most effectively symbolized by the scene in which the Prioress masturbates while describing the curé's lovemaking with Philippine; if this is horrifying it has nothing to do with the physical act represented, only with what it tells us of her blighted and loveless inner state. The sceptical contemporary doctor Quillet did quite justifiably say the nuns were afflicted with "Hystéromanie, ou bien Erotomanie", although facile masculine assumptions about frustrated spinsterhood should be avoided here. As Grandier himself recognizes, sexuality is only the most extreme case of the sensual pleasures these young women are expected to renounce, despite their lack of true vocation; the annihilation of the self for which the Bishop calls, if enforced rather than freely given, must generate enormous tensions.

Intimate scenes like the one just mentioned benefit from the close-up effect of *The Pit*, but the nature of the theatre seems to cause problems elsewhere. The numerous entrances and exits of the first half are obtrusive, rather too much like a pageant, while the very flat and unexciting use of lighting presumably results at scenes are internally unexciting. Grandier's circumstances; actresses playing nuns who are themselves acting (with varying degrees of conviction) the symptoms of possession are liable to appear less than convincing. That the first outbreak should look amateurish is plausible enough, as is the nuns' failure to put on a decent show under the sceptical eye of Grandier's friend, the Chief Magistrate de Cersay. There must, however, be at least one moment when the audience can understand how

reasonable men might give credence to the reality of the possession, and Whiting included what was clearly intended to be such a scene in conjunction with the visit of the sceptical Prince de Condé. We may all be getting weary of exhibitionist obscenity on stage, but that is precisely what is called for here. Instead of a hasty romp in which everyone sweeps out of sight, the audience should be fascinated, excited and appalled, like the real audience in Loudun three-and-a-half centuries ago. Whiting's exorcists, like their historical models, are credulous and intellectually dishonest, qualities very well conveyed by Mark Dignam's rustic Father Barré, but they genuinely believe in the possession, and need more vigorous diabolism than that shown here if they are not to seem merely absurd.

The ultimate villain of the piece is the royal commissioner, de Laubardemont; what everyone else does out of ignorance or under intense internal pressure, he does cynically and callously. Determined to satisfy his master, Cardinal Richelieu, he links Grandier's political and private offences, and manipulates the possessed nuns in order to destroy him. This is only a little unfair to the historical Laubardemont, who does seem to have convinced himself that the possession was genuine, but was plainly a very nasty man indeed, generally loathed as *le bourreau du Cardinal*. Joseph O'Connor's performance is a disappointment, too bluff and direct, when the character should be younger, seedier, and much more sinister. This does slightly lessen Grandier's extraordinary triumph as, in the almost unbearable final scenes, he defies Laubardemont's efforts to force a confession, wins the sympathy of onlookers and even enemies, and even starts to exorcise the commissioner himself, the true fulcrum of the evil which permeates the play. As the action narrows itself down to the con-

frontation between Grandier and Laubardemont, who had condemned him entirely on the evidence of devils supposedly speaking through the possessed nuns, were deaf to the irrefutable case for the defence, the victim appealed to the world at large and to posterity. This production has its flaws, but it is still worth spending an uncomfortable but gripping evening in *The Pit* hearing that appeal again, and entering some of the darkest places in the human heart.

## A facer for the farceur

Harold Hobson

BAMBER GASCOIGNE

Big in Brazil

Old Vic

In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* Tom Stoppard had the engaging notion of imagining what the events in *Hamlet* would look like from the viewpoint of characters on their periphery. Bamber Gascoigne has, in *Big in Brazil*, carried the idea a stage further, and enquired how Feydeau (or any other farce writer for that matter) would regard the universe if he found himself mixed up in the plot of a Feydeuvian play. It is an interesting speculation (more philosophical than those to be found in most farces), and Gascoigne treats it with the erudition and aplomb to be expected from one of the best brains of his Cambridge generation.

*Big in Brazil* has the ingredients of the noblest farces of the past: a double bed, a *chaise-longue* with comments by Mrs Patrick Campbell, mistaken identities, quick changes (marvellously brought off by Timothy West), a sing-along event from which all subsequent incidents derive, much feminine underwear (boldly displayed by Prunella Scales), a hurricane of anticipated disasters, and above all, a couple of wide-eyed innocents (Miss Scales and Mr West again) building up, with complete and endearing purity of heart, a diabolical plot to bring about the confusion of their great enemy, the

Police Chief of Manaus, a thousand miles up the Amazon. Daisy Wray (Scales) and Charlie Mucklebrass (West), an actress and her manager, are people of unbounded hopes, and their wild ambition is that he should present her as a star at the Grand Theatre, Leeds. Their heads reel at the grandeur of this conception. So what, in order to prepare for it, could be more natural than that they should come to the heart of South America, and she pretend to be Mrs Campbell in a play by Georges Feydeau, whom they have heard of as a great author, but of whose works (though Gascoigne isn't) they are regrettably ignorant? Gascoigne sees to it that all this is strictly conformable to logic, and the collapse of their enormous scheme, with the Police Chief (Derek Smith) and Miss Scales falling repeatedly off the *chaise-longue* with the inevitability of Newton's apple is as funny as anything in Feydeau.

Newton, of course, has a great deal to do with farce, which is generally regarded as a conglomeration of incidents so preposterous as to be anarchic. This is the precise opposite of the truth. It is the essence of farce that it should obey the same rigorous laws as classical physics, with effect following cause with inexorable inevitability. Once the Chief of Police has, as the result of a disconcerting incident on the Champs-Élysées, conceived a bitter hatred of Frenchmen, everything in *Big in Brazil*, from Georges Feydeau's appearance in the Hotel Grande, Manaus, to Charlie Mucklebrass's kind-hearted and easily frustrated duplicity, follows with cosmic necessity.

J. H. C. 116







# The stalled locomotive

Martin Jay

PERRY ANDERSON  
In *The Tracks of Historical Materialism*  
112pp. Verso. £15 (paperback, £4.95).  
0 8091 776 2

Perry Anderson might well have called his *Wellek* lectures at the University of California, Irvine *On rather than In the Tracks of Historical Materialism*. For their major concern is the current obstacles to the progressive realization of the promise of Marxist theory. Beginning by reflecting on the predictions he made at the end of *Considerations on Western Marxism* in 1976, Anderson acknowledges that whereas many have been realized, the most crucial – “the reunification of Marxist theory and popular practice in a mass revolutionary movement” – has not. With admirable candour, directed among other targets at the Trotskyist movement with which he has been associated, Anderson sets out to provide an “internal” as well as “external” explanation for this failure.

Anderson locates the major internal or purely intellectual source of what is only the latest in a series of “crises of Marxism” in the widespread success of structuralist and post-structuralist thought emanating from Paris, the current “capital of European intellectual reaction”. In a powerfully argued chapter on the dialectic of subject and structure that will be of interest to anyone, whatever his or her political inclinations, concerned with recent theoretical trends, Anderson focuses on the consequences of the French “exorbitation of language”. Inflating linguistics into the master model of all social analysis, he charges, is inappropriate for a variety of reasons. The exchange of signs is an inadequate analogy for economic behaviour, and the “exchange of signs” is a social relation, not a linguistic one. The “exchange of signs” is a social relation, not a linguistic one. The “exchange of signs” is a social relation, not a linguistic one.

Anderson explains this shift, which he sees as having most dramatically occurred in the Latin countries of Europe, in terms external to theory as well. Beginning with Western Marxism’s incapacity to assimilate the sombre lessons of Soviet Communism, a failure best symbolized by the uncompleted second volume of Sartre’s *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Anderson points to a succession of subsequent historical disillusionments whose implications were also troubling for Marxist theory. In particular, he stresses the collapse of the myth of the Chinese cultural revolution and the dampening of hopes in Eurocommunism. The latter, he claims, was especially decisive in stimulating the strong turnabout in attitudes towards Marxism.

By emphasizing this second failure, in particular, Anderson is pointing to the need for a new synthesis of Marxist theory and practice, one which can account for the new situation in the world, and which can be understood as its model.

## Autumn retrospective

Michael Rosen

JÜRGEN HABERMAS (Editor)  
*Observations on “The Spiritual Situation of the Age”*  
Translated by Andrew Buchwalter  
381pp. MIT Press. £28.50.  
0 262 08132 6

With their covers bare of illustration, their vivid colours shading gradually from one book to the next, the shelves devoted to the *edition suhrkamp* in West German bookshops have seemed to represent the Bundesrepublik as it

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either. And, finally, the obsession with signifiers at the expense of what they signify, the turning away from the referential function of language which even Saussure had emphasized, undermines the crucial distinction between truth and falsehood, which Anderson claims is the “ineliminable premise of any rational knowledge”.

In ways too complicated to detail here, Anderson then probes the transformation of the initial anti-subjectivism of structuralists like Lévi-Strauss into the hyper-subjectivism of post-structuralists like Derrida, who none the less also reject the possibility of a coherent, totalized rational subject. “The adoption of the language model as the ‘key to all mythologies’”, he contends, “far from clarifying or decoding the relations between structure and subject, led from a rhetorical absolutism of the first to a fragmented fetishism of the second, without ever advancing a theory of their relations.” Because of this lack, these movements were highly volatile in political terms, ultimately coming down on the anti-Marxist side after the misfiring of Althusser’s attempt to generate a structuralist Marxism.

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would like to be seen – clean, bright, progressive, orderly. Picking out one of the volumes and looking at the tightly-printed list of titles inside its back cover one notes a remarkable collection of authors (the Bs: Brecht, Benjamin, Bloch (Ernst), Thomas Bernhard, Jürgen Becker – but also Baudelaire, Beckett, Bloch (Marc), Barthes, Kenneth Burke, Baran and Sweezy, Bachrach and Baratz and many others); the élite troops of the Suhrkamp Verlag, in their smart jackets, ready to meet the educational explosion of the 1960s and 70s.

And meet it they did in a quite remarkable way. In the promotion of serious modern literature, in providing a forum for aesthetic, philosophical and social theory, and in its extensive programme of translation, it is doubtful whether any publisher has ever, anywhere, been so dominant as Suhrkamp was in those years. But was there really (as George Steiner once put it in these pages – to the great delight of the Verlag) a “Suhrkamp culture”? And, if so, what has happened to it?

On the occasion of the one thousandth volume of the *edition suhrkamp*, the distinguished Jürgen Habermas wrote to a group of his contemporaries and colleagues loving them to take part in a collaborative project. His idea was that they should take up the theme of Karl Jaspers’s *On the Spiritual Situation of the Age*, which had been the thousandth volume of a similar collection, the *Sammlung Göschen*, in 1931.

Habermas’s main purpose was not, however, to mark a milestone in publishing history – or even the thirtieth anniversary in 1979 of the founding of the Bundesrepublik, which would coincide with the book’s publication. The need that he and his colleagues felt for some kind of collective stock-taking relates to the aftermath of the “German Autumn” of 1977. The events of that year – the attempt to

contrasts with an Anglo-American and Northern European world where a “steadier and more tough-minded historical materialism proved generally capable of withstanding political isolation or adversity”. There may well be a measure of wishful thinking in this comparison, at least for America where Foucault and Derrida are far more likely to be cited these days than Lukács or Marcuse. But in so far as an alternative linguistic theory has gained popularity outside of Latin Europe, a theory which can be used to renew rather than undermine Marxism, his generalization has some merit. That theory is derived largely from the work of Jürgen Habermas, whose absence from *Considerations on Western Marxism* Anderson now explicitly regrets.

Acknowledging the tenacity of Habermas’s political commitment and the remarkable scope of his theoretical enterprise, Anderson none the less faults him for an idealist over-estimation of the communicative potential in language, which curiously mirrors in reverse the French fetish of the linguistic. Whereas the latter “developed a kind of diabolism of language, Habermas has unwittingly produced an angelism”. As a result, Anderson concludes, he has underplayed the importance of labour and thus missed the still central role only the working class can play as the agent of radical social change.

In his final observations, Anderson briefly confronts the challenge to the traditional Marxist primacy of the proletariat posed by the recent feminist, ecological and peace movements. He acknowledges their value in reintroducing questions of the relationship between nature and history, as well as their contribution to the long neglected subject of socialist morality. But denying the ability of any of these new social movements to spark a more universal human liberation, he defends the necessity of working them together with the broader emancipatory struggle, refuses to “let the revolutionaries” abandon its Archimedean vantage-point: the search for subjective agencies capable of effective strategies for the dislodgement of objective structures. Inevitably, a work as wide-ranging and com-

bargain for the release of gaoled members of the Baader-Meinhof group by the hijacking of a Lufthansa jet to Mogadishu; the long drawn-out kidnapping of the industrialist Hans-Martin Schleyer; the deaths in Stammheim prison of Andreas Bamber, Gudrun Ensslin, and Jan-Carl Raaspe; Schleyer’s subsequent murder by the terrorists – produced a political reaction so intense and enraged that it seemed entirely possible that it would sweep away with it whatever was rational or critical in West German public life. Now, if ever, was the time for the “Suhrkamp culture” to show how secure were its roots.

The threats came from both directions. On one side, public hostility and anger against the terrorists were being channelled on to the far more visible target of the democratic Left who had (it was said) prepared the ground for terrorism. Yet each new authoritarian measure on the part of the state (wholly pointless, it would turn out, in the actual pursuit of the terrorists) seemed only to reinforce the gnostic mysticism on which the Baader-Meinhof group was premised: the idea that terrorism would “tear the mask” from the system and reveal its “latent fascism”.

Something of the hysterical and harrowing atmosphere of those months comes across in the film *Germany in Autumn*, made shortly afterwards by a group of leading German directors. It was a time when nothing dreadful seemed impossible. Several of the contributions to *Observations on “The Spiritual Situation of the Age”* appear to have been written by men in a state of shock, hardly able to accept the reality of the destructive emotions around them. Yet, whatever its shortcomings as political analysis, this book is a document of great significance placed in its context by Andrew Buchwalter’s admirable introduction and notes. It gives voice to a generation of German intellectuals whose experiences might

pressed as *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* invites a number of questions. The linkage, for example, between the French “exorbitation” of language and the collapse of Eurocommunism needs to be more explicitly spelled out, especially as the prime Italian representative of the turn against Marxism, Lucio Colletti, has expressed his disillusionment by espousing a violently anti-linguistic neo-positivism that denounces Marxism for not being scientific enough. One might also wonder about the absolute contrast Anderson poses between the infinite creativity of *parole* and the scarcity of economic life, in the light of Georges Bataille’s influential notion of a “general” rather than “restricted” economy based on *dépense* (waste or expenditure) instead of the production and exchange of scarce goods. The characterization of Habermas’s naively “angelic” reversal of the French “violation” of language might also warrant revision, for Habermas himself explicitly repudiated this very failing in his debate with Gadamer’s idealist hermeneutics. And finally, whether or not the very concept of a collective historical agent – a concept derived from the Hegelian notion of a meta-subject and abandoned by structuralist, post-structuralist and Habermas alike – can still be defended is very much in doubt. For not only have the theoretical assaults on it taken their toll; so too has the failure of history to produce such a beast, except in the dangerously distorted guise of a vanguard party claiming to act in its name.

With the magisterial command of relevant literature and keen eye for crucial questions that his readers have come to expect, Anderson has produced a book that goes to the heart of the deepening crisis of the tradition which he has eloquently and vigorously defended for almost a quarter century. Any future attempt to work its way out of the quandary of contemporary Marxism will have to acknowledge its place along its destined route. That it still may be stalled, despite these efforts, testifies to the immovability of the obstacles that the modern world presents to any theory that hopes to ride the ringing grooves of change into a better future.

have been of crucial value. Successful academics in late middle age, for the most part, they are all old enough to have experienced Nazism at first hand, yet did not come to maturity until after its defeat. Their traumatic memories as Hitler-Youth members and boy soldiers were to leave them hypersensitive to political fanaticism in all its forms. As Dieter Wellershoff says in his essay:

“Count me out” was the maxim of the survivor, who at that time in Germany shed their uniforms with the determination never to wear one again, not even an inner uniform, no collectively ordered world-view, no ideology.

It was the hope of Wellershoff and those like him that such disillusionment might lead to a political order in Germany in which the moderate virtues of humanity, generosity and self-restraint would flourish. That their hopes were in vain the events of 1977 made bitterly clear. Yet the lessons which they were forced to learn are not ones which apply to Germany alone. Wellershoff remembers his first visit to England in the 1950s:

On the trip across the Channel I listened to a radio programme commemorating the anniversary of the Battle of Britain, in which Hitler’s invading air force had been destroyed. The speaker, a clergyman, said, as if it were a metaphysical certitude, “God flew at our side.” At one time something similar had appeared on the belt-buckles of German soldiers: *Gott mit uns*. I turned out to have been a grotesque deception.

And the conclusion he draws is surely the right one: “Even in defeat there are special opportunities for insight.”

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# The vagabond in vogue

Virgil Nemoianu

PANAŢI ISTRATI  
*Le Pèlerin du cœur*  
Edited by Alexandre Talex  
259pp. Paris: Gallimard. 70fr.  
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On January 3, 1921, in the Parc Albert in Nice, a man was found with his throat slashed, a failed suicide. His name was PanaŢi Istrati, and he was the illegitimate offspring of a washerwoman in the fluvial part of Braila in Romania. Istrati had been a vagabond since the age of fourteen, roaming the Balkans, the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Europe, trying all kinds of trades and feeling the heavy hand of the police in a dozen countries. He had even written a little, but his few publications had merely attracted the patronizing encouragement of critics inclined to be generous to self-taught working-class writers. His political and union activities had been fiery and generous, but he was obviously too inconsistent, emotional and lacking in discipline to be truly useful to the leaders of the political Left.

Instead of a suicide note the wretched young man had left a long letter full of pathos and humour addressed to Romain Rolland. This was forwarded to the great pacifist writer whose *Jean Christophe* had impressed Istrati as the greatest masterpiece of modern prose. Rolland in turn was smitten by this protégé, proclaimed the young vagabond a Gorky of the Balkans and, as Istrati recovered, began to coach him for success. Within seven years Istrati had published two dozen short stories and novels, the bulk of his oeuvre, which were hailed by the critics and lapped up enthusiastically

by an audience used to the exotic melodramas of such as Loti, Paul Morand, Pierre Benoit and Joseph Kessel. His faulty French, whose grammar and idioms were copied from an uneducated Romanian, added spice and authenticity to stories that depicted a lurid, semi-rural world of violent passions, drunken crimes, misery and cloying sentimentality. In it, instinct-dominated individuals commit sadistic crimes and pay for them with terrible sufferings. The rich and powerful torture the down-trodden masses. By any serious aesthetic standards this was less than distinguished writing.

Istrati’s fall from grace was equally swift. He was invited in 1928 to visit the Soviet Union and spent over a year there. Within a few short months all his anarchist instincts were roused to fever pitch. He felt intense hatred for the Leninist system although he was far from recognizing its full repressiveness. Typically, much of his first book about his Soviet experiences was devoted to a marginal case of petty injustice: the family of an elderly Jewish revolutionary who had lost his party standing was being harassed by local housing officials. Despite its limited scope the book, coming as it did from a darling of the radical literary establishment, was one of the first major statements of “deconversion” and provoked a wave of indignation. Rolland had already closeted himself with his protégé and pleaded for days against its publication. Istrati was greeted as a traitor by a chorus of journalists in France and found it more difficult to publish thereafter; he certainly lost the critical acclaim to which he was accustomed. He was a broken man and his remaining years were a blurred and confused decline. The tuberculosis he suffered from got rapidly worse. Two more anti-Soviet books appeared under his signature but they were

written by others (one of them by Boris Souvarine, the émigré Trotskyist and one of the first “Kremlinologists”). In Romania, whither Istrati now returned, he had been treated all along with icy contempt by the critics. He gave lectures for pacifist-humanist foundations and spoke up for striking coal-miners, but few listened. From his sick-bed he joined forces with a leading defector from the Romanian Fascist movement, who soon ended up being backed to pieces with an axe by his former comrades. Istrati died in 1935.

This pathetic career is nevertheless fascinating, not least because Istrati’s writings continue to hold public attention: they were translated into most European languages, they are now available once more in their entirety in French paperback editions, half a dozen competent critical monographs have appeared in France and Romania in the past ten years or so, and intellectual journals have devoted whole issues to the discussion of Istrati’s ideas and craft.

This puzzling success may be explained by the traditional French search for noble savages, for the values of a worthy innocence. If Mme de Staël’s noble savages were the Germans and Chateaubriand’s the Amerindians, in the 1840s and 50s the Romanians enjoyed a brief vogue in France as the Danubian principalities struggled to achieve sovereignty and to be unified. Both Edgar Quinet and Michelet were enthusiastic about the authenticity and significance of Romanian folk-culture. The Romanian political and cultural élites remained forever grateful for this interest, regarded France as their alternative fatherland and vowed to turn the newly independent country into a Belgium of the Balkans, a voluntary satellite. For most Romanian intellectuals, probably to this day, French society remained an Eden, an ideal projection where the many contradictions (rural-urban, cultural-practical, democratic-noble) of their own soci-

French interest in Romania, however, soon began to ebb, until, in Istrati, Romain Rolland and others found a perfect object for their enthusiasm: he was rebellious, rootless, naïve and impetuous, an authentic, unsophisticated intellectual secreted organically by the masses. Such enthusiasms are, alas, short-lived and voracious: the poor victim is imperiously possessed, consumed and discarded, which would probably have been the fate of Istrati, even without his stubborn political integrity. (Towards the end of his life he described himself as “the man who will adhere to nothing.”)

In the case of Istrati another misunderstanding was at work, well illustrated by the present anthology of recollections, fragments, lectures and reflections, most of which had been long out of print and are now reverentially reissued by one of his old friends to celebrate the centenary of his birth. These show that Istrati was not an ignorant, spontaneous writer, but rather a man of plans and deliberations, albeit plaintive and sentimental ones. In a word, Istrati is an example not of the noble savage, but rather of what Michael Oakeshott has called the “individual *manque*”. He is one of those who feel saddened and threatened by the accelerated dissolution of social bonds and values in a modernizing world and by the emergence of unattached individuals. He came from a part of the world where accelerated progress had led more than once to farcical results and he had an unerring eye for the suffering and loss that accompanies such progress even at its best. The amount of suffering Istrati embraced and experienced, as well as his huge sympathy for those who were defeated, is truly astonishing. The “individual *manque*” is a less than likable character – resentful and scheming, but it is only fair to let him speak for himself. Istrati did so with touching sincerity, rejecting all political masks and pretence. He thereby remains, even in defeat, oddly attractive to a wider readership than feels an at least occasional temptation to

## HIGHLIGHTS IN SOCIO/PSYCHOLINGUISTICS

Teun A. Van Dijk: *Prejudice in Discourse. An Analysis of Ethnic Prejudice in Cognition and Conversation*. Paperbd. Hfl.53.–/\$21.00  
In this book a study is made of ethnic prejudice in cognition and conversation, based on extensive interviews of white majority group members in Amsterdam.

Philip Luelsdorff: *Constraints on Error Variables in Grammar: Bilingual Misspelling Orthographies*. Paperbd. Hfl.60.–/\$24.00. Hardbd. Hfl.110.–/\$44.00  
“...This is a most impressive piece of work, which entangles many conceptual snarls having to do with the notion of error in linguistic performance, and which places the analysis within an overarching framework for the discussion of linguistic phenomena...” Arnold Zwicky in a reader’s report.

Walburga von Raffler-Engel: *Nonverbal Behavior in the Career Interview*. Paperbd. Hfl.48.–/\$19.00  
“...This interesting and well-written monograph describes the author’s investigations concerning the impact of interviewees’ nonverbal behaviour exhibited during employment interviews. Desirable and undesirable behaviours are specifically cited. This book should be available in academic libraries and placement offices, community college level and up...” From “Choice”, May 1984.

Jürgen Steucki: *Social Order in Child Communication. A Study in Microethnography*. Paperbd. Hfl.45.–/\$18.00  
The discipline of microethnology comprises research methods of context analysis, ethnology, and conversational analysis and seeks to locate phenomena of social order in both verbal and nonverbal behaviors.

Ruth Wodak & Muriel Schulz: *The Language of Love and Guilt*. Paperbd. Hfl.48.–/\$19.00. Hardbd. Hfl. 75.–/\$30.00  
This book is a socio-psychological and cross-cultural linguistic study of the discourse patterns mothers and daughters of various social backgrounds are engaged in. The topic is interesting to a wide readership, i.e. socio-psycho- and textlinguists, as well as people involved in research with regard to mother-daughter relationships.

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## The novelist as icon

John B. Dunlop

ALEXANDER FODOR  
Tolstoy and the Russians: Reflections on a  
relationship  
175pp. Michigan: Ardis. \$22.50.  
088233 8919

Alexander Fodor's *Tolstoy and the Russians* is at least two books, perhaps three. As the subtitle, "Reflections on a relationship", suggests, the book seeks to be a meditation on the mystical linkages between Tolstoy and the Russian people. It is also in part about Tolstoy's reception in the Soviet Union and, up to a point, a "life and works" of the great novelist.

The weakest parts are the "reflections on a relationship". *Ad hominem* assertions and sweeping generalizations make their appearance with numbing frequency: "To know Tolstoy is to understand the Russians, and no-one can really understand Tolstoy without understanding the Russians." "In general, most of Tolstoy's works have more appeal for Russians than for foreigners." "Tolstoy is regarded by [contemporary Russians] as Mother Russia's most precious gift to mankind." "Tolstoy is popular today because he understood the Russians better than any other writer." Such generalizations are never underpinned by evidence in the form, say, of polls taken of Soviet or Russian émigré readers. One suspects that Fodor has consulted his heart, and perhaps a Russian friend or two, before launching these dicta. A bit more rigour might have been expected from a professor of Russian literature.

If "reflections on a relationship" were all that this book is about, one could safely advise readers to look elsewhere to satisfy their interest in Tolstoy or in the cultural politics of the terms with an unpredictable aristocrat who gave three Russian emperors his name.

keenly interested in Tolstoy, and during the period 1908-11 wrote seven articles on him. Tolstoy's restless indignation against the old order, which was fuelled by the periodic floggings and executions of peasants, rivalled that of Lenin. Stefan Zweig's comment, quoted by Fodor, that "None of the nineteenth-century Russian revolutionaries smoothed the path for Lenin and Trotsky so much as this anti-revolutionary Count" has an element of truth in it. One should, however, be a bit cautious here. Lenin also thought Tolstoy a "crazy landlord obsessed with Christ" and contemptuously rejected the non-violence preached by Tolstoy (and later embraced by Gandhi).

Lenin, Trotsky, and Lunacharsky all admired Tolstoy's writings and recommended that certain of them—for example, the novel *Resurrection*—be spooned to the newly literate masses. On the other hand, Marxist purists during the 1920s had aching doubts about the appropriateness of tendering Tolstoy to the *narod*. The novelist's mentality was deemed to be "as religious and authoritarian as that of any feudal lord", while the book *Lenin or Tolstoy* insisted that one had to choose. The Tolstoy centenary, which took place in 1928, required that the régime come to some position on Tolstoy, and Stalin, who was always clever about accommodating national symbols, decided upon a cautious acceptance of the novelist. Certain works in Tolstoy's oeuvre, including the patriotic *Sevastopol in December* and "Death of Ivan Ilich", were judged illit, as were Tolstoy's religious and ethical writings. From the beginning, the Bolsheviks also had difficulties with the patriotic, religious and "aristocratic" novel *War and Peace*, which Nicholas II had had mass-produced in the belief that it would help to mobilize the Russian public after the outbreak of the First World War.

As Stalin contemplated the ominous growth of the "patriotic" Tolstoy in 1941, Stalin made *War and Peace* and

in mass editions. In 1942, a play based on *War and Peace* was produced, and, in 1943, an opera. The Nazi "desecration" of Tolstoy's estate, Yasnyaya Polyana, was also played up by the Soviet media.

With his usual heavy-handedness, Stalin decreed Tolstoy to be a Russian icon, and he has remained such to the present day. Critics such as Boris Eikhenbaum, who had the temerity to point out the Western origins of much of Tolstoy's thought, risked being labelled "rootless cosmopolitans". The scourge of the emperors Alexander III and Nicholas II became for the Soviet régime a Russian patriot, *tout court*. Soviet Stalin's princely sponsorship ensured that Tolstoy's writings—with the exception of his narrowly religious and ethical works—would be made available to the masses.

Fodor ought to have taken more than a cursory glance at Soviet textbooks and school curricula in order to learn how precisely Tolstoy has been mediated to the Soviet populace. Contemporary Russians have come to love and admire that Tolstoy which has been presented to them by the Soviet schools. But what kind of Tolstoy is it that the schools purvey to the masses? Fodor does not seem to realize that his Tolstoy is not necessarily that of the Soviet textbooks.

By the time of the Tolstoy sesquicentennial in 1978, Tolstoy's hallowed status had been firmly and unshakably established. In 1977, even the aging Brezhnev made a pilgrimage to Yasnyaya Polyana to pay his respects. There was talk at this time about publishing Tolstoy's religious and ethical writings, but such talk has presumably been reduced to whispers under the authoritarian Andropov and Chernenko régimes.

*Tolstoy and the Russians* at times slides into the genre of a "life and works". Fodor knows the primary and secondary Tolstoy literature well, but this does not prevent him from making serious lapses in literary judgment. In discussing Tolstoy's "patriotic" works, for example, he writes: "But not all literary works are 'whole' and 'finished' by a lofty or uneven

craftsmanship? Again, concerning *Resurrection*, he writes "[Tolstoy] was more interested in the social backgrounds of his characters than in representing them artistically". But surely this lack of representation suggests artistic failure?

Fodor also fails to deal adequately with Tolstoy's religious thought. Tolstoy, he believes, was "one of the greatest minds that Russia has ever produced", but he offers little evidence to underpin this assertion in the sphere of religion. I have always found Tolstoy ludicrously weak as a religious thinker, and Fodor offers no convincing arguments to change my opinion. One recalls that Tolstoy stalked through the Gospels crossing out everything that failed to accord with his "reason", modestly baptizing the result "True Christianity"; he had important religious revelations after a game of cards and a bottle of wine. Compared to Dostoevsky's, Tolstoy's religion seems to belong to an era when one wanted to wed rationalism and faith and ended up with neither.

It would also have been helpful had Fodor engaged Tolstoy the man, rather than indulging in mawkish hagiography. He would have Tolstoy a "hedgohog" (in Isaiah Berlin's formulation), whereas one constantly has to do with a "fox". What demons drove Tolstoy? Why did Merezhkovsky, as Fodor notes, compare him to Stenka Razin and Emelya Pugachev, the leaders of Russia's great peasant rebellions? Who was at fault in his stormy relationship with his wife (Fodor plausibly ducks the question)? Perhaps some psychoanalysis of this eminently analysable man might have been appropriate.

*Tolstoy and the Russians* is a sprawling, undisciplined book that tries to do many things but succeeds in doing only one (the survey of Soviet responses to Tolstoy and his writings) reasonably well. In style and organization of material, Fodor has perhaps sought to imitate such free-wheeling Tolstoy commentators as Merezhkovsky and Bulgakov. The book is brilliant, he lends more often to plunge into words than soar in the empyrean. But the book is nevertheless worth reading.

additions and "embellishments".

5. The translator must hear his or her translation; some of the most accurate translations have been ruined because the translator has cloth ears.
6. The translator must constantly guard against thoughtlessly slipping into the habit of reproducing the syntax and phraseology of the source-language. A translator, putting a foreign work into, say, English must never for a second forget that he or she is writing an English book.
7. Ultimately, everything depends on the translator's sensitivity, literary tact and sense of fitness.

Professor Leighton took on one of the most technically difficult exercises that a translator can tackle, the intricacies of which are explained frankly in the Introduction. Chukovsky naturally chose almost all of his illustrative examples from works translated into Russian; how then to show English-language readers just why these passages of *Russian* are good or bad translations is extraordinarily difficult, and is only solved by the editorial persona firmly taking over from the translator. Even so, while bravely taking most of the hurdles in this tough course, Leighton did balk at the last and stiffest fence—Chapter Ten, in which Chukovsky makes a detailed study of the translation of Ukrainian poetry into Russian. On the grounds that a comparison of poetries between two very closely related Slavic languages is effectively impossible to convey in a third language, the translator has acknowledged defeat and omitted this chapter. Less forgivably, perhaps, certain other passages have been omitted without any editorial or typographical indication; the copy-editing (of an admittedly complex text) is not always due to scratch; and notwithstanding the credit due to Leighton for giving us this valuable work in English, this translation quite often sins against the third, fifth and sixth commandments of Chukovsky's heptalogie.

## Well beyond reason

G.S. Smith

ADA STEINBERG  
Word and music in the novels of Andrei Bely  
312pp. Cambridge University Press. £29.50.  
0521237319

J. DELSWORTH  
Andrei Bely: A critical study of the novels  
263pp. Cambridge University Press. £19.50.  
0521247421

ANDRI BELY  
Petersburg  
Translated by Robert A. Maguire and  
John E. Malmstad  
356pp. Penguin. Paperback £3.95.  
014064125

Andrei Bely was the most lavishly gifted, the most versatile, and the most irrepressibly productive of the major Russian Symbolists, and he remains the most elusive. Fifty years after his death, he continues to intrigue. In the Soviet Union, the years since the Malmstad/Maguire *Petersburg* was first published have

seen two editions of the novel, in different redactions. But a collected edition in Russian is inconceivable in the near future. In the Soviet Union on ideological grounds, outside on commercial grounds. Such is the fate of many Russian writers of this century; in the case of Bely it is more regrettable than usual.

As we know from autobiographical writings published only very recently, in his own view he kept a commitment to Symbolism throughout his creative life. But to others, his literary and intellectual development was a succession of wild lurches from one extreme position to another, each self-advertised more vehemently than its predecessor. And even to those who wished him well, Bely's incandescent intelligence sometimes seemed indistinguishable from clinical insanity. His return to Russia in 1923 after a brief sojourn in the Berlin émigré community, and the traces in his subsequent work of what could be construed as accommodation with the Soviet régime, cast a shadow over Bely's reputation among Russian émigré critics.

At the same time, the clear incompatibility of his thought with any kind of materialism

meant that balanced comment on his work was and has remained impossible in the Soviet Union. There was hardly any serious discussion of Bely from any quarter for thirty years after his death. When such discussions began, it was largely restricted to western academic circles. But even there, the formidable obscurity of his conceptual world, the maddeningly solipsistic language of the theoretical works, and the chaotic state of his literary legacy guaranteed that even academic interest would be confined to a small number of enthusiasts.

The problem addressed in *Word and Music in the Novels of Andrei Bely* has been recognized by all readers of Bely's fiction. The novels are densely patterned with rhetorical devices evidently designed to achieve thematic coherences of a different kind than may be obtained through the unfolding narrative and sequential characterization of the Realist novel. Ada Steinberg's book contains the most comprehensive catalogue we have been given so far of these devices. But her hypothesis that musicological categories provide a more efficient means of analysing them than literary ones remains unproven. There is actually nothing in Bely's work that can be studied more effectively with musical than with literary tools, notwithstanding the considerable number of references to music in the writings and the interest Bely took in the musical life of his time— aspects which are admirably documented in early sections of this book. The last and best section, "Bely's original solution to the problem of synaesthesia", discusses his perception, artistic use and theory of colour. Even if Bely did indeed learn to modulate colour by analogy from Wagner, the parallel between this feature and Wagner's *Leitmotiven* remains an interesting sidelight rather than an illumination.

J.D. Elsworth maintains that in order to do Bely justice as a novelist, we have at least to take seriously his grappings with two large bodies of ideas, Symbolism and Anthroposophy, rather than write them off as obscurantist pages of logical silliness.

to conclude that Bely's theoretical work "can only be criticized from a standpoint that it specifically rejects", that is, one of non-transcendental reason. But he has shown that even if this is so, the thought may still be credibly presented in an objective and accessible way.

Elsworth discusses the seven major texts, in chronological order of composition: *The Silver Dove* (first separate publication 1910), *Petersburg* (1916), *Kotik Letnev* (1922), *The Baptized Chinaman* (1926, unfinished), *Notes of an Eccentric* (1922), *Moscow* (two parts of a proposed three published in 1926), and *Masks* (1932). He deals systematically with textual history and then summarizes plot (neither of these an easy enterprise), reviews the major characters and themes, examines stylistic problems, and closes with a concise placement of each text in the context of the entire oeuvre. Elsworth finds, as all readers must, that *Petersburg* is Bely's supreme achievement.

The appearance of the Malmstad/Maguire *Petersburg* in the Penguin Modern Classics series is the first token of penetration beyond the narrow specialist readership. This is a facsimile of a translation that first appeared in 1978 and includes the translators' admirable introduction and laudatory notes. What would constitute a "good" translation of this exceptional novel is no easy question. The real difficulties of Bely's text only begin at the level of literal fidelity. The book is among other things a debate with the Russian literary mythologizations of St Petersburg, and here the foreign reader will be guided by the notes.

But in Russian, the remarkably innovative style of the book was calculated to be rebarbative. The text is hacked up into very irregular paragraphs, with unclearly attributed passages of direct speech and dialogue, and a system of punctuation that was and remains an offence to Russian norms. Modernisms include hypnotic repetitions, cross-references, verse inserts, phonetic patterns, copious examples of

Michael Glenny

KORNEI IVANOVICH CHUKOVSKY  
The Art of Translation ("A High Art")  
Translated and edited by Lauren G. Leighton  
294pp. The University of Tennessee Press.  
\$19.95.  
087049 4058

Here at last is a version in English of a classic work on translation—a book written and rewritten, published, revised and republished in the Soviet Union over a span of nearly fifty years. A distillation of Kornei Chukovsky's attractive personality, his lightly-worn erudition and his passion for translation, *A High Art*, allied to its author's unremitting personal advocacy, has been a most influential factor in creating the enviable high standards of literary translation in the Soviet Union, and hence (in part, at least) the immense popularity of translated literature with the Soviet public.

Born in 1882, by the age of twenty-one Chukovsky was already the London correspondent of an Odessa newspaper, and from then on his

written output did not cease until—literally—the last hours of his dying day in October 1969. It is no exaggeration to say that even fifteen years after his death he is perhaps the most genuinely beloved man in the Soviet Union, thanks to his genius as a children's writer; there cannot be a Soviet citizen born after 1921 (the year in which his *Adventures of Krokodyl Krokodilovich* was first published) who was not brought up on Kornei Chukovsky's entrancing prose and verse for children: he was the Russian equivalent of Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear, A.A. Milne and Dr Seuss all in one—and, incidentally, the Russian translator of Carroll and Lear. His penetrating, scholarly, yet entirely accessible study of child psychology and early linguistic development, *From Two to Five* (first published in 1925), is still a basic, indispensable text for Soviet pedagogues and children's authors alike.

Just as *From Two to Five* was based on loving observation and personal experience in writing for children, so Chukovsky's *A High Art* (originally, in 1920, entitled *The Principles of Literary Translation* and written jointly with the

ill-fated poet Nikolai Gumilyov, who a year later was shot as a counter-revolutionary) in its final redaction of 1966 is the quintessence of empiricism; owing nothing either to Soviet literary theories such as formalism or socialist realism, or to such Western doctrines as structuralism, it derives rather from a lifetime's practice as translator, poet, critic, biographer, memoirist and editor. From his hoard of innumerable examples of good and bad translation, skilfully chosen and wittily presented, but golden—axioms which the practitioner will recognize with gratitude, and which should be compulsory reading not only for every would-be translator but for every critic; the critics, especially those in English-speaking countries, get short shrift from Chukovsky, who dismissed the majority of them as unfitted to pass judgment on translated literature.

Paraphrasing and condensing them, his essential maxims are:

1. Spare no effort to master not only the literary lexicon of your source-language but also every nuance, historical and contemporary, of folklore, dialect, vernacular, slang, humour and abuse, together with a maximum of possible cultural references.
2. Abhor blunders (Lauren G. Leighton's ingenious translation of Chukovsky's coinage *gladkopis*, i.e. the translator's substitution, through inadequacy, of flat, neutral, vague, wishy-washy language for words that in the original are pungent, colourful, striking and precise. The translator's vocabulary must be the equal of the author's in richness and flexibility.
3. The translator must, of course, accurately reproduce the subject matter, images, ideas and plot of the original work; but he has an equal, if more difficult obligation to convey the author's tone, pace, style and literary personality.
4. Heavy-footed literalism is as lethal to a translation as inaccuracy or irresponsible

additions and "embellishments".

5. The translator must hear his or her translation; some of the most accurate translations have been ruined because the translator has cloth ears.
6. The translator must constantly guard against thoughtlessly slipping into the habit of reproducing the syntax and phraseology of the source-language. A translator, putting a foreign work into, say, English must never for a second forget that he or she is writing an English book.
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Georgette Donchin

KONSTANTIN MOCHULSKY  
Aleksandr Blok  
Translated by Doris V. Johnson  
451pp. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.  
\$30.  
08143 1726X

Konstantin Mochulsky, best known to English readers for his book on Dostoevsky (translated in 1967) was born in Odessa in 1892, left Russia in 1919, and settled in Paris, where he died of tuberculosis in 1948, a few months before his work on Blok appeared in print. His life illustrates the tragic fate of the Russian émigré. Following the Russian Revolution, he follows the path of the present volume. Following a spiritual crisis in the late 1920s, a broken academic career, and poorly paid editorial and journalistic work, Mochulsky soon distanced himself from the various émigré circles, and became deeply involved in religious and philosophical activities. He spent the war years in terrible material conditions and his health deteriorated rapidly.

Mochulsky combined his religious and academic interests in a series of critical biographies of Russian writers, the very choice of whom is suggestive: Gogol (1934), Solov'yov (1936) and Dostoevsky (completed in 1942, published in 1947). He then turned towards the Symbolists, putting to good use his personal involvement with the Symbolist world and his early interest in the formalist method. His books on Blok and Bely appeared posthumously, in 1948 and 1955, and it is significant that the former is much superior: he could identify more closely with the mystical and apocalyptic aspects of Blok's poetry than with the anthroposophical meanderings of Bely.

Mochulsky's Blok is a romantic *par excellence*, "the genius and the victim of romanticism". The author stresses the poet's paternal and Germanic heritage, to which he traces his dual perception of the world, his musico-lyrical instinct, a sense of impending doom, and the "poison" of irony—plus a history of mental imbalance. He is most sympathetic to the young dreamer, the spirituality and the irrationality of his early poetry and the irrational and mystical basis of his art—in other words to what he calls Blok's "musical" soul. Blok's mystical temperament, his spiritual meeting with Solov'yov, the mood at the turn of the century with its vague expectations and mystic forebodings, merged into an art that strove to express in words what was essentially inexpressible. "The radiance of the atmosphere" was first apprehended musically, and the *Verses on the Beautiful Lady* were born of music; attempts at philosophical grounding came later. Pointers to all Blok's future paths are contained in the first volume of his poetry, and Blok himself is reputed to have said before his death: "I wrote only a first volume. All the rest is trivia."

The ambivalence that informs Blok's entire

poetry is already present here: he is not only a prophet and a seer but also a man in love with the girl next door, and out of this tension there will rise the inexhaustible lyrical theme of the Eternal Feminine and the *Terrible World*. The split personality engenders doubles; delirium and nightmares alternate with religious ecstasy, romantic irony follows mysticism and explodes in Blok's first dramatic experiment, *The Puppet Show*. After *The Snow Mask* and *Faina*, in which Blok created art out of despair (as he wrote, "only what is the writer's confession, only that work in which he burnt himself to ashes . . . only that can be great"), there comes the calm simplicity of the third section of *Free Thoughts*. From 1908 onwards he longs to soil "do not come empty."

"real" drama, but *Song of Fate* is a failure; he conceives an epic of "worldwide scope", but the long poem *Retribution* remains unfinished (its theme is the tragedy of romanticism, and like the objective narrative form eludes him). Likewise, he encounters difficulties with the form of *The Rose and the Cross*, but this time instead of creating a realistic drama, he produces a masterpiece. Without having all the facts at his disposal, Mochulsky senses Blok's personal involvement, and sees the play as the culmination of the poet's romantic theatre.

Mochulsky's perceptive comments on Blok's articles, which had attracted comparatively little attention from earlier scholars, illuminate Blok's method as a whole. With these, he created a new form of prose in which ideas and images are subordinated to a musical system and settle into a distinctive rhythmic order. Reasoning becomes "emotional melody", logic is replaced by poetic correspondences.

Throughout his life Blok was searching for "music", for the underlying harmony of things. Seduced by Nietzsche, he equated the concepts of culture, music, elemental force and folk mass: civilization was doomed to collapse; the old world was perishing; the masses were the unconscious bearers of the spirit of music. And thus Blok saw in the Revolution an elemental musical force, an all-cleansing conflagration.

In the terrible winter of 1918, Blok abandoned himself for the last time to his poetic inspiration, and produced *The Twelve*, the most significant poem of the Revolution and the culmination of all his creative work. In the days that followed, Blok forgot "how to write poems and how to think about poems."

Even if we do not always share Mochulsky's perspective, he illuminates some of the most important sources of Blok's art and enriches our understanding of it. This classic monograph has weathered remarkably well considering the amount of new material made available since, and the recent publication of the exhaustive two-volume biography by Avril Pyman. It remains a helpful and well-focused, if somewhat schematic and subjective, introduction to Blok's life and work and was well worth translating.

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# Disassembly line

Michael Hofmann

BEAT STERCHI  
Blösch  
436pp. Zurich: Diogenes.  
3 257 0164 5

The subject of *Blösch*, Beat Sterchi's first novel, is agriculture, or, more precisely, man and his food. The focus of the book falls not on one but on two figures: Ambrosio, the Spanish *Gastarbeiter* who comes to Switzerland as a farm-hand, and Blösch, the lead-cow of a small, old-fashioned dairy-farmer (the word "Blösch" being the term for a calf that is an unbleached red all over). In the course of the novel, both are processed, ground up in the mills of what is now cutely, placatingly, called "agri-business". The man is forced to leave his first employment, and moves to the city as a slaughterhouse worker, where he meets Blösch again, fallen on hard times. In the horrific scene in which she is slaughtered, her massive, hypertrophic backbone resists first the electric saw, then a number of manual tools, culminating with a medieval cleaver; when this also fails, the enraged workman chops wildly at her carcass, and the slaughterhouse inspector stamps her as "Ungeussbar", unfit for human consumption.

In the twelve chapters of this long novel, Sterchi alternates scenes from Ambrosio's year on the farm with a slow, chronometrically timed account of his final day at the slaughterhouse. This intercutting technique, at once mechanical and traumatic, makes the most of both types of material, constantly working to compare and contrast. Moreover the arbitrariness and ruthlessness of this alternation prevent the farm-scenes from expanding into a sentimental idyll. There is, oddly enough, first, the unremitting pressure of work, and secondly the fact that things so wrong, the calf

more progressively inclined. The remorselessness of this progress is grimly confirmed each time the action moves forward to the slaughterhouse: it is *Welterschauung*, as well as novelistic technique.

Also seen to advantage in Sterchi's alternating narrative are the varying responses of Ambrosio to his work and environment. To him - puny, alien, incomprehending - the farm has a kind of insane gigantism and richness: the farm-dogs are as big as horses; the cows are huge, placid, greedy, envious. Separated from wife and child, he spends hours in the cowshed until he sees, in the markings on one of the cows, the complete, perfect outline of his native Spain. His attitude towards "the prosperous country", as it is called, is compounded of bemusement, melancholy, scorn and loneliness. With an Italian, Luigi, and the extraordinary, alcoholic figure of the local rat-catcher, he forms a trio of unattachables. In the slaughterhouse, though these are in the majority: foreign workers performing the menial, disagreeable tasks of a one-time craft industrialized and accelerated into a disassembly line. The atmosphere of boredom and routine horror constantly bordering on mutiny is quite extraordinary. The collaboration between men and animals that took place on the farm now finds its counterpart in violence and pain. The 'best milker is the man who can extract the most milk; the best sticker, the most blood.

In the life-stories of some of the employees, as elsewhere, we are reminded of ancient epics and sagas: there is the same primitivism and enormity, the dreadful, murderous life of the senses is the same - but so is the rough tenderness of the farmer Knuchel for his cows. The main difference lies in the fact that the world of *Blösch* is almost entirely the world of production; the other side of the story, consumption, is barely allowed to appear. The consumer in *Blösch* is the slaughterhouse inspector, by extension, inner life, emotion, love or leisure, Sterchi's

# Thresholds

Peter Labanyi

PETER HANDKE  
Der Chinese des Schmerzes  
256pp. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.  
3 516 045 12 1  
Phantasien der Wiederholung  
113pp. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.  
3 518 1168 X

Andreas Loser, a classics teacher separated from his wife and two children, one day knocks down a pedestrian in Salzburg. He immediately requests leave of absence from work giving as an excuse his report on the excavation of a Roman villa. Loser's archaeological speciality is thresholds, and he feels that he is poised at a moment of transition. What he wants above all is time; not to do anything but simply to accumulate space for his contemplative state and he wanders aimlessly, registering random impressions, sights and sounds. Then in an outburst of characteristically Handkesque semiclamor, he destroys election advertisements and other signs that he comes across during one of his walks. Loser's horror of the threat of signification is balanced by a love of nature and of the object-world in general, which, gratifyingly, does not denote and thus demands no understanding.

On the way to his weekly tarot game on the Münchberg, Loser comes across some freshly sprayed swastikas. With a stone he kills the man who did them and pushes his body over the cliff - as much for polluting the mountain with signs, as for neo-Nazi sympathies. This act should be his existentially liberating turning-point. But nothing really turns. Having joined his fellow card-players, Loser engages them in conversation about thresholds and their symbolic overtones. The guiding thread here is the protagonist's avowed reconstructive skill. This is his "threshold awareness", an appreciation of which what is enables us to divine significance.

For several days, Loser is immobilized. After which he shows the mirror, is not displeased with what he sees (solipsism begets narcissism) and goes out. This resurrection occurs, somewhat obviously, over the Easter weekend. After a fashionably woman he meets at the airport ("I'm leaving you now. It's late", she tells him), Loser begins to plug himself back into the other aspects of his social existence. He visits his mother in an old people's home. He undertakes an Italian journey to Virgil's birthplace - references to the *Georgics* stud the text. Back at school, he por-



Dr. Gustav Scheve, enthusiast of the phenomenological theories of Francis Joseph Gall, reproduced from Heinz Gebhardt's Franz Handke: Von der Lithographie zur Photographie (202pp. Munich: Beck, 0 3 406 09586 0).

tentiously notes the new phase his life has entered: "And at the same time, so I believed, something was behind me for good. A part of me had fallen over the cliff along with the man I had killed. I was no longer playing along; at least it was a different game." Finally, he sees his family and, in search of a "witness", goes to his son's bedroom to tell him a story, a "threshold story". The book ends with Loser contemplating the comings and goings on a bridge ("like the portal of a church") - another threshold.

In a revealing sentence in *Der Chinese des Schmerzes*, Loser tells us that he prefers going to bars where nobody knows him because, when he leaves, they won't be talking about him: "But my presence will have been noticed". This primal anxiety afflicts both the protagonist and author. As Handke says in his journal, *Phantasien der Wiederholung*, what was written around the same time: "No one thinks about me, unless I myself do". For Loser, alienated from society, nature provides the necessary confirmation of his existence: the nearby forest is "my element. There seemed to be endless room, for me alone. On a tree trunk I suddenly grew out toward the sky, as if I were a bird, as if I were a leaf, as if I were a part of a landscape".

From the prison of selfhood, Loser escapes nature is a delusion of bourgeois epistemology, a compensatory by-product of the domination of nature. Handke struggles unsuccessfully to find a "home", which is defined without people, which is ultimately not even a "landscape" but constructed and held together by language alone, the medium which from a social perspective he regards as treacherous. Journal and novel share not only a common genesis and common materials but also a common discourse and hierarchy of interests. *Der Chinese des Schmerzes* is no less a vehicle for the author's sentimental musings, and seems essentially capricious and unconvincing.

# On the couch

John Neves

DIETER KÜHN  
Die Kammer des schwarzen Lichts  
367pp. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp  
3 518 04699 1

Lothar Brusberg is a teacher of English and German who has abandoned the security and monotony of a schoolmaster's existence to develop and sell a mobile language laboratory to grammar schools up and down the country. While following his new calling he is beset by mysterious bouts of fever which, over a period of years, finally make work impossible for him and force him to resign his job. At the same time he becomes more and more addicted to extra-marital affairs, which his wife will not tolerate.

Having lost his job and his wife, he views his past, present and future from this low point in his life and decides to consult a music-therapist, Mehring. *Die Kammer des schwarzen Lichts* largely consists of the story of Brusberg's life as he tells it to his therapist, who light. Brusberg eventually accepts that he is not by nature monogamous, and that his divorce has given him a new freedom, and with this realization his high temperatures disappear as

suddenly as they had come. We leave him in restored health, ready for a new start in life.

Dieter Kühn returns to this novel after a fallow period of nine years since his imaginative but lightweight *Stanislaw der Schweiger*. During that time he has evidently had some profound thoughts about the form of the novel, for *Stanislaw* gives few clues to the direction his new book would take. Common to both is his mastery of poetic detail: the park scenes in *Stanislaw der Schweiger* are echoed in this novel by the snowscapes with which much of the first part of the book is taken up, and the painstaking descriptions of the psychiatrist's consulting rooms.

The heart of *Die Kammer des schwarzen Lichts* is the "chamber of black light" of the title, the room in which Brusberg lies on Mehring's couch and recounts the story of his psychosomatic bouts of high temperature. Even though the reader may not sympathize with or even find convincing the "freedom" and sense of identity Brusberg achieves at the end of Mehring's treatment, Kühn successfully evokes the frustration and misery of an unaccountable illness. The psychiatrist's couch has rarely been painted in such natural colours, or to such poetic effect. Kühn's study of the emotions surfacing in Mehring's "black light" puts him in the front rank of German novelists writing today.

# Bumper song-book

John Willett

BERTOLT BRECHT  
Das grosse Brecht-Liederbuch  
Edited by Fritz Henneberg  
Three volumes. 516pp. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.  
3 518 02416 7

In various veins and on various levels Brecht has been the greatest writer of song texts this century. Not unreasonably he had quite definite ideas about how they should be set to music and sung, and although he himself was untrained both musically and vocally he could give compelling examples of what he wanted in both respects, as can be heard from his own record of "Mac the Knife" or David Bowie's of the *Bad* songs to the tunes devised by the poet. They were compelling enough to persuade major composers to go along with his views, with the result that their settings bear a Brecht family resemblance whatever their own dissimilarities. So this Bumper Brecht Song Book (as the German title may perhaps be rendered) has a unity and a line of development which does not lie simply in the words. Since many of the early songs have never before been published - nor even, in some cases, transcribed from Brecht's own curious notation - the interest and practical value of Fritz Henneberg's three-volume voice and piano selection is obvious.

Its most immediate attraction, aside from the care and clarity of its physical presentation (in an East-West German co-edition), lies in the opening fifty pages, which start with Brecht's own early settings, now transcribed and equipped with discreet piano accompaniments by Kurt Schwaen, then move on to his first musical collaboration with the little-known (and short-lived) cabaret composer Franz Servatius Bruinier. Bruinier, who died of tuberculosis a month before the premiere of *The Threepenny Opera*, was a piano pupil of Egon Petri and a friend of the poet Klavend, a collaborator of the *chansonniers* Jean

series of Monday performances in Berlin called "MA". He appears to have begun working with Brecht late in 1925 - a year before Brecht met Weill - and the signs are that he helped him with the transcription of the *Hauspostille* melodies, likewise with those to the "Barbara Song", "Pirate Jenny" and maybe also "Surabaya Johnny", then orchestrated these last three for cabaret performance and composed his own versions of "Marie A" and "The Ballad of Hanna Cash". His "Surabaya Johnny", alas, is not included in the Song Book, probably because only the instrumental parts have survived, but the subsequent Kurt Weill settings of the two *Threepenny Opera* songs (as they were to become) both show echoes of the Brecht-Bruinier versions: the "Barbara Song" in its rhythm and one phrase of the refrain; "Pirate Jenny" in the rhythm of the verse and the whole refrain, tune and all. Then with Weill's appearance on the scene in March 1927 Bruinier seems to have dropped out.

After that fifty-page mark, most if not all of the material has already been published, so the question becomes one of selection. The editor's principle here is to give priority to the most popular (or popular, which is not quite the same thing) songs, then go for popular poems, even in less good settings, finally sprinkling the whole with a few relatively obscure songs that he thinks deserve to be better known. In the event what this adds up to is sixteen songs by Weill, thirty-nine by Hauns Elser, thirty-four by Paul Dessau, on whom Henneberg has already written more than one book, eight by Rudolf Wagner-Régeny, who swam into Brecht's orbit after 1945 as a collaborator of his friend Caspar Neher, and three by Schwaen. These are grouped in the first volume under the titles of the plays in which they occur; then in the second volume, individually by composer and under titles of groups of songs. This practice makes it awkward to include more than one setting of a particular text, which is presumably the reason why Dessau's version of "Song of a German Mother" is preferred to Elser's, and Elser's of "The Song of the Nazi Soldier's Wife" (from *Schwelke*) to Weill's. It would have been interesting to compare them.

The piano parts have been simplified and the omissions are legion. There is nothing by Hindemith, who seems not even to rate a mention, though he was closely involved in the first (whose contact with Brecht was more marginal). Nor is there anything from Lindberghflug, *Simone Machard*, *The Exception and the Rule* and the opera *Lucullus*. Dessau's "Fraternization Song" from *Mother Courage* is missing, though Ernst Busch's jarring pseudo-Dutch song - whose words are not by Brecht and are not in any text of the play - has been put in. And many of Elser's finest songs are not there. Unfortunately it doesn't seem to have occurred to the editor to make inaccessibility a criterion for inclusion. So Weill's "Hosanna Rockefeller" and "Red Rosa" are passed over and - more surprisingly still - not even the early material is complete. Bruinier is supposed to have written a setting to the "Exemplary Conversion of a Brandy-peddler" (later set by Weill for *Happy End*), but it is not given. Nor are Brecht's own tunes for "Orange Song", the "Song of the red army soldier", the "Alabama" and "Benares" songs, "Mounted on the fairground's magic horses" and the "Ballad of Friendship". Tunes to the first four of these were in the *Hauspostille*, but the others are unpublished.

# Raffishly romantic

Robert Cushman

ETHAN MORDDEN  
Broadway Babies: The people who made the American musical  
244pp. Oxford University Press. £19.  
0 19 503345 0

This is the best book yet written on the American musical, though that is not actually much of a claim. Apart from works of reference, of struck picture books, an annotated and lavishly opinionated, but gaudily composed book from Martin Gottfried. There is also a previous effort by Ethan Mordden, *Better Foot Forward*, which he engagingly describes in the word, which he engagingly describes in the bibliography to yet another work, *The American Theatre*, as "pleasing but superficial". *Broadway Babies* comes - exceptionally in this sphere - from a writer who knows that there are other things in the theatre than musicals, and indeed other arts than the theatre. He and indeed other arts than his subject or over-intellectualizes it, but he never abrogates his intelligence either. He is a buff, but he is also a critic.

His title is misleading. He is not principally concerned with chorus-girls, stars, actresses or actors. The main focus is on composers; the book ends with Sondheim and begins with Victor Herbert. Mordden does deal with performers, and with directors, choreographers and producers. Anybody who ever worked the street qualifies, it seems, as a "Baby", an awkward term which recurs throughout the book, to designate a successful song that has no particular connection to its source, and "numbo", "more than a number... the show's signet, an essence of its experience... a key moment... a ground zero of super showmanship".

The *Floradora* sextet was apparently the first numbo. "Yet someone wrote the words; someone set the music." And he identifies as a turn-of-point the combination of Cole Porter and Ethel Merman. Merman may have seemed an autonomous performer, but Porter's actually defined her personality. Mordden's "musical play", blending a lot of operetta (romantic) with a little of musical comedy (raffish). Other historians have identified these two streams but Mordden is the first to press the case for their union, accomplished by Hammerstein, first in *Show Boat*, which remained one of a kind, and then in *Oklahoma!*, after which everybody joined in.

Rodgers and Hammerstein's shows were not star vehicles and thus they ended what Mordden calls "Performers' Rule" - though he hints that this has recently returned in debased form. On the other hand, as his chapter on clowns

illustrates, Mordden knows what was valuable in Performers' Rule and what was lost in Hammerstein's victory. He cites great comedians like Bert Lahr who vanished or went into exile. For the most part Mordden's thrust is towards the integrated romantic (Hammerstein) or satiric (E. Y. Harburg) musical. The comic show gets short shrift. It is startling to find a history of musicals, even an avowedly selective one, whose main text contains only one reference to the "comic musical". It is a pity that Mordden's survey by Cecil Smith, and a lavishly opinionated, but gaudily composed book from Martin Gottfried. There is also a previous effort by Ethan Mordden, *Better Foot Forward*, which he engagingly describes in the word, which he engagingly describes in the bibliography to yet another work, *The American Theatre*, as "pleasing but superficial". *Broadway Babies* comes - exceptionally in this sphere - from a writer who knows that there are other things in the theatre than musicals, and indeed other arts than the theatre. He and indeed other arts than his subject or over-intellectualizes it, but he never abrogates his intelligence either. He is a buff, but he is also a critic.

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# Emblematic careers

Michael Hulse

MANFRED BIELER  
Der Bär  
445pp. Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe.  
3 455 00357 5

Writing of Manfred Bieler's first novel, *Bonifaz oder der Matrose in der Flasche*, R.C. Andrews observed that "compared with satirists like Orwell and Huxley, Manfred Bieler is an irrepressible optimist". Twenty years separate that impressive debut from his masterly new novel, and if there has been a change in Bieler it is not in his comic inventiveness, satiric dryness, Dickensian vigour, warmth or compassion: it is in the quality of his optimism. Bieler's faith in the resilience of humankind, in the communicability of kindness and goodness and in the ability of common sense to expose the humbug of political systems (of whatever kind); still informs *Der Bär*, yet the fate of Hermann Donath undermines that faith. The smile of the irrepressible optimist is now, it seems, directed at the pathos of life.

Bieler (born in 1934) has lived since 1968 in West Germany, where he arrived from East Berlin after a three-year sojourn in Prague, but the setting of *Der Bär* is his home town of Zerbst (in the middle of that Anhalt triangle formed by Braunschweig, Leipzig and Berlin). Given the historical sweep of the novel, from the early years of the century to the 1960s, the bear of the title can be associated with Berlin, with Prussia, and later with Russia; but the bear is also the town emblem of Zerbst, and the nickname of the powerful six-foot carpenter, Otto Donath, whose gruff presence broods throughout.

It is his son Hermann, though, who occupies the foreground, from his years of learning the building trade to wartime unfitness for service (tuberculosis) and the office of town air-raid warden, subsequently to the holding of higher office. (*Landrat*) and finally an eight-year prison sentence. This is one kind of German career: two others are exemplified by his friends Joachim Schenk and Lothar Witte. Schenk precedes Donath as *Landrat* but is removed from office and sent to prison when his wartime SS career is revealed; Donath, who cannot believe Schenk guilty of the crimes ascribed to him, later learns that indeed a quite different Schenk was the SS officer with whom Joachim was confused but by this time it is too late, for Joachim's sanity has gone. No optimism here. Donath's boyhood friend Lothar war years they together realize an early ambition to build a sanatorium for Zerbst, but later Lothar Witte leaves the GDR to embark on a new career in the West: ironically, it is that brings about his own downfall, for he follows Witte to Hamburg, to urge him to reconsider, and in doing so commits a number of transgressions that render him unfit in East German eyes.

These three men, in their good fortune and their bad, are brought before the reader with zest and energy, and without ponderously didactic attempts to point up their representative functions in German history. Equally skilfully drawn are the three women in Hermann's life: his dry, likable wife Annemarie, his cool, businesslike lover Vera, and the constantly faithful third, Hanna. A robustly colloquial idiom keeps Bieler's pace close to the neo-naturalist conception of his portraits.



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## INDEX OF BOOKS REVIEWED

I fear they're not the sort to see,  
these Christians of the South,  
the only real eternity  
is a tale (like your tail) in the mouth.

## VII: Canens

You pick the children up at ten and drive them East to Dunwich; a coastline they're too young to remember, the city under the sea. Where nothing of what happened remains. Casually, you ask them how their mother's been—She was looking drawn, you thought, and they speak of her tempers and headaches. Right, past the church, You follow the B-road to the Bird Reserve, A wind from Holland streaming through the hives.

*The marrow in her bones was dissolved  
By sadness and she wasted in air,  
It's said the sources are always one  
And the same; Ovid, ibid, got a pair  
Of readings by the mill on Walberswick Marsh.  
Your heart contracts to nothing as you consult  
The drawing in your Child Ornithologists' Guide:  
The male plump on freshwater molluscs,  
The female sheltered under his rufous wing.*

And her old letter, marking the entry  
For *picus viridis*; the green one and its mate:  
*I believed in you. To survive as we did*  
*Early on, and then a second child and third:*  
*I grew to think of it as an achievement.*  
*It was your going away that changed it.*  
*Not the affairs themselves but the knowledge*  
*I'd been living with an impostor.*  
*It's all, you see, a question of trust.*

This is how ghosts begin, the ash of memory,  
White hawthorn and the mild-frothed river,  
The milky shards she dug from the berberis  
Out of someone else's past, as if this mist  
Were the breath of the land's dead labourers,  
The yeomen and marshmen, the husbands  
And husbandmen, the sowers of seed  
Among flint and hummocks, gathering barley  
While the North Sea cantered at their back.

And the cottage by the kalefields that year  
After Finland: they had frozen all posts  
And for a summer you lived there unoccupied  
Getting every detail by heart – the beads  
She wore, the swing under the apple-tree,  
The vine, the sandpit, and the hinged lid  
Of the nesting-box that was always going  
To reveal some featherbedded circle  
Of happiness, but somehow never did.

You call them back to you, like a moorhen  
With her bleeping chicks across the furry stream.  
These reeds go down to where the beach begins,  
A sandstone cliff-edge wearing into nothing,  
Less and less each year, as there is less and less  
Of her, a drained fen, a voice in a millstream  
Trying not to reproach, trying to keep  
The children from its whispered briny song:  
*Yes, we were happy – but only for so long.*

BLAKE MORRISON

**F. W. RATCLIFFE with D. PATTERSON**  
**Preservation Policies and Conservation in**  
**British Libraries: Report of the Cambridge**  
**University Library Conservation Project**  
 146pp. British Library. Paperback, £9.50.  
 07123 3035 6

"Books deteriorate" is the message of the Radcliffe report, commissioned by the British Library in a valiant attempt to raise the consciousness of all libraries to the urgent need for thought and action. The Cambridge University Library Conservation Project was established to investigate existing preservation policies and training facilities in a profession where such matters have tended to be shelved, in favour of the rapidly developing technological features of librarianship and information retrieval. It might seem that the twentieth century had conspired against the survival of the book, in its determination to make the printed word widely available. Bulk production of wood-pulp – and therefore highly acid – paper in the late nineteenth century was followed in quick succession by changes in mechanized binding techniques, the erection of brightly lit and warmly heated libraries, stringent fire regulations which restricted air-circulation and, last but not least, an ever-growing reading – and handling – public.

Consciousness of the need for preservation has grown since the end of the Second World War, has been shocked into the provision of emergency measures to cope with disasters, such as the Florence floods in 1966, but has lapsed into apathy and complacency about everyday concerns. While the contrast with the more highly developed archival conservation programme is pointed out, *Preservation Policies and Conservation in British Libraries* also demonstrates that seeming reassurance has been always to hand for the librarian with the notion of the 'surrogate' or 'replaceable' item.

The method chosen by the committee was to send out questionnaires, followed up by inter-

views and personal contacts. Time was spent on background work and publicity, the latter providing in itself benefits to the cause. A pilot questionnaire was drawn up derived from the experiences of six institutions with a strong archival base. Since two attitudes were under investigation, namely those relating to policy and education, two differing approaches had to be prepared. The policy questionnaire was sent to 387 libraries, just under half of them public ones, with the significant inclusion of 102 college libraries in Oxford, Cambridge and London. Although their returns, particularly those from the two older universities, might distort the general picture, it was nevertheless thought that the importance of their holdings in the national heritage merited their being covered. Archival repositories were excluded to avoid ambiguity and as an acknowledgment that in most of them preservation and conservation consciousness was already high. 275 institutions that were presumed to offer some form of training or education in librarianship were sent the training course questionnaire.

The committee was gratified by the response to both surveys. A high level of interest and realization of the need for urgent positive action was expressed in the replies to the first questionnaire; an appalling lack of provision for adequate training was indicated in the answers to the second. While the need for competent management and administration, as opposed to the purely bibliographical services provided by librarians, has been catered for, it appears that educationalists have overlooked the fact that their pupils might have no substance to manage, administer or even digest unless they were taught the elements of physical care. If that substance came under the heading of "micro-forms and non-book media" the danger was even greater.

In addition to probing attitudes and investigating provision, the questionnaires also sought the response to the proposal of a potential role for the community.

respondents favoured an advisory rather than a practical service and there was no consensus of

opinion on the most suitable location. The committee regards the establishment of such a centre as meriting a high level of priority and in the final recommendations suggests that it would be crucial to the adoption of any national preservation programme. Useful comparisons are drawn with the Canadian, Australian and American experiences, the last underlining the inevitability that Great Britain will follow the United States in the age of the "brittle book".

The recommendations made by the committee logically follow their analysis of the returned questionnaires. One of the most important conclusions is that preservation need not cost money. It is cheaper to preserve than to conserve and every book-handler in the country can assist; all libraries should review their own policies and practice, and jointly demand a conservation education for trainees. A campaign is needed for the introduction of acid-free paper and the establishment of a national advisory and research centre. Standards in environmental control must rise if the national heritage in the printed word is not to crumble to dust.

The report concludes with nine papers submitted by committee members in 1982 or read at the Cambridge dissemination seminar in 1983. All either explicitly or implicitly emphasize the crucial role of communication between librarian and conservator. A case-study by M. L. Turner of the problems experienced by the Bodleian Library is useful in charting progress which can be made, albeit under difficult physical circumstances and in a period of recession. A strong emphasis on good storage and protection facilities should indicate to librarians – dismayed at the implicit criticism of the profession within the report as a whole, and at the extra burdens which it appears they may well be forced to bear – an immediate course of action which would reduce future problems, if not solve them.

That means all of us.

## An Italian census

## Conor Fahy

In the first century of printing Italy was at the centre of the European printing industry; in the period up to 1550, more books were printed in Venice than in any other European city. Or perhaps one should say that more books are thought to have been printed there than anywhere else. For there is a difficulty. While the fifteenth-century picture is extremely well documented, for the sixteenth century, when the bulk of this activity occurred, it is impossible to get complete and accurate information about Italian printing, since none of the major Italian libraries has ever published even a partial catalogue of its printed books; some of them have not even got on their premises for use by readers. The most informative publication on the subject is still the British Library's *Short Title Catalogue* of its own holdings of Italian books before 1601; but these, at the British Library's own estimate, do not comprise more than a quarter of the surviving production.

Now, however, the situation is being transformed, thanks to the initiative and enthusiasm of a handful of librarians working for an Italian government department, who are compiling a census of sixteenth-century Italian printing, which aims to fill once and for all this huge gap in our bibliographical knowledge. The census will benefit not only what are generally called Italian studies, but also, owing to the central position of Italy in European Renaissance culture, a whole range of other disciplines, such as classical studies, law, Church history, Hebrew studies, the history of ideas, the history of science and technology and the history of medicine.

The census - the *Censimento delle edizioni*  
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